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KLEMENS KARLSSON

Face to Face with the Absent Buddha.
The Formation of Buddhist Aniconic Art

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ABSTRACT

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Early art in Buddhist cultic sites was characterized by the absence of anthropomorphic images of the Buddha. The Buddha was instead represented by different signs, like a wheel, a tree, a seat and footprints. This study emphasizes the transformation this art underwent from simple signs to carefully made aniconic compositions representing the Buddha in a narrative context.

Buddhist aniconic art has been explained by a prohibition against images of the Buddha or by a doctrine that made it inappropriate to depict the body of the Buddha. This study rejects such explanations. Likewise, the practice of different meditational exercises cannot explain this transformation. Instead, it is important to understand that early art at Buddhist cultic sites consisted of simple signs belonging to a shared sacred Indian culture. This art reflected a notion of auspiciousness, fertility and abundance. The formation of Buddhist aniconic art was indicated by the connection of these auspicious signs with a narrative tradition about the life and teachings of the Buddha.

The study emphasizes the importance Śākyamuni Buddha played in the formation of Buddhist art. The Buddha was interpreted as an expression of auspiciousness, but he was also connected with a soteriological perspective. Attention is also focused on the fact that the development of Buddhist art and literature was a gradual and mutual process. Furthermore, Buddhist aniconic art presaged the making of anthropomorphic images of the Buddha. It was not an innovation of motive for the Buddhists when they started to make anthropomorphic images of the Buddha. He was already there.

Keywords: Buddhist art, Buddhist sculpture, Aniconic art, Indian art, Iconology, Buddhism, Buddhist meditation

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To my son
Emanuel

Contents

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Problem and Aim

1.1.1 The Problem of Aniconism in Buddhist Art

One of the most striking features of early Buddhist art is the so-called aniconic art.[1] It can be found at such sites as Sāñcī, Amarāvatī, Bhārhut, Bodhgayā and Sārnāth. This art was made between approximately the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD. Fig. 1 shows one of these images. In the centre there is a bodhi-tree (*bodhivṛkṣa*), a seat (*āsana*)[2] and the feet or the footprints of the Buddha (*buddhapāda*).[3] These three signs together seem to represent the Buddha without depicting him visibly. This and similar reliefs have often been regarded as representing a specific event in the life of the Buddha. Fig. 1 has been regarded as representing the enlightenment and fig. 2 the first sermon of the Buddha. The tree is allegedly pointing to the enlightenment and the thousand-spoked wheel to the first sermon.

If we look at fig. 3, we will observe that this art is not without problems. Just as in fig. 1 we can see a *bodhivṛkṣa*, an *āsana* and a *buddhapāda*. There is, however, one important difference. In fig. 3 we can also see on the *āsana* a round medallion with a Buddha image. What does fig. 3 represent if fig. 1 represents the Buddha? As the medallion is placed on the *āsana*, it looks as if the Buddha has an image of himself on his knee. He may even be sitting in his own knee.

There may be several explanations of this problem. One may be that this image is a missing link between the aniconic art and later anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha. It is possible that the artist wanted to strengthen the meaning for the sake of clarity. This may indicate that the meaning of the aniconic art was not clear enough at the time when this relief was made. This explanation is not fully satisfying, as the relief is rather late and there were already images of the Buddha at that time.

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[1] The terms *aniconism* and *aniconic art* will be defined in *Terms and Definitions* (1.2.1).

[2] I use the word *seat* (*āsana*) as an all-embracing term as long as no futher specification of its function is needed. See also 1.2.4 and 1.6.5.

[3] *Pāda* means "foot" and *padavalañja* "footprint", "track". T W Rhys Davids & W Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Oriental Books Repring, 1975 (1921–1925)), pp. 408, 452.



Fig. 1. Indexical sign pointing to the Buddha. *Bodhivṛkṣa*, *āsana* and *buddhapāda.* Amarāvatī *stūpa*, 2nd century AD. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

A more simple and natural explanation may be that fig. 3 depicts a Buddhist sacred site in an undetermined time after the death of the Buddha. If this is the case this relief does not represent the Buddha himself. Instead, it represents a real *bodhivṛkṣa* and what is taking place there. It may represent the tree in Bodhgayā, but it may also represent another *bodhivṛkṣa*. Susan Huntington, at the Ohio State University, is of the opinion that most of the reliefs in Bhārhut, Sāñcī and Amarāvatī represent worship at sacred Buddhist sites and not aniconic representations pointing to the Buddha.[4]

In a relief in Bhārhut (fig. 4) we can see a ladder standing beside a *bodhivṛkṣa*. There are two footprints on the ladder, one at the top and one at the bottom. This is commonly interpreted as representing the event when the Buddha returns to earth after visiting his mother in the Trāyastriṁśa heaven. Is it also possible to interpret this sign as depicting a place of worship? This is exactly what Susan Huntington has done. She believes that Sankasya had become a major pilgrimage centre as early as the 3rd century BC and that an

[4] S L Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India. Buddhist, Hindu, Jain.* With Contributions by J C Huntington (New York: Weather Hill, 1985). S L Huntington, "Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism", *Art Journal* 49 (1990), pp. 401–408. S L Huntington, "Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems. Another Look", *Ars Orientalis* 22 (1992), pp. 111–156.

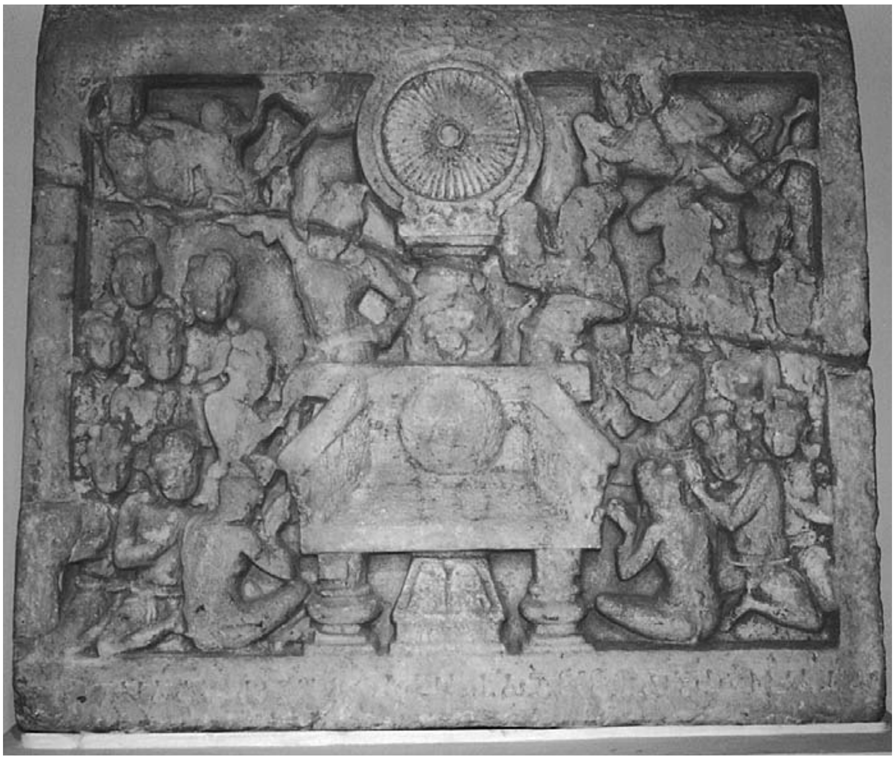


Fig. 2. Indexical sign pointing to the Buddha. *Cakrastambha*, *āsana* and *buddhapāda*. Amarāvatī *stūpa*, 1st or 2nd century AD (78x86,5x12). National Museum, Delhi (Acc no 70.1./2).

actual ladder was the focal point of worship there.[5] The Chinese traveller and pilgrim Xuanzang visited Sankasya in the 7th century AD. He observed an ancient tradition of ladders at the place. The original one had been replaced at later times by ladders made of bricks and chased stones ornamented with jewels.[6]

It seems to be more difficult to interpret fig. 5 as depicting worship at a sacred site. This image, which is believed to depict successive phases of a single episode, has usually been interpreted as the great departure of the Buddha. The four riderless horses with their regal parasols are depicted in such a way that it is difficult to believe that the relief represents anything other than the young Buddha leaving the palace. Is it really possible to interpret it as anything else? According to Susan Huntington it is. Huntington has proposed that the relief depicts a processional celebration of how the Bodhisattva

[5] Huntington, "Early Buddhist Art ...", p. 404.

[6] Xuanzang, *Si-Yu-Ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World. Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629)*, Vol. 1, Translated by S Beal (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1976 (1884)), p. 203.



Fig. 3. Iconic sign depicting worship. *Bodhivṛkṣa*, *āsana*, *buddhapāda* and medallion with Buddha image. Amarāvatī *stūpa*, 2nd century AD. Amarāvatī Museum.

leaves the palace[7] or the celebration and honouring of his horse, Kaṇṭhaka.[8] In other words, she believes that the followers of the Buddha had set up a kind of passion play or a pageant and the horse plays the leading actor. Her argument, however, is not convincing. Her main point is that the sacred tree in the middle suggests that the horse is being led to a site that was already sacred, implying that the events in the relief are taking place after his departure and do not represent the departure itself.[9] However, the sacred tree in the middle may not be the *bodhivṛkṣa* at all. Instead, it may be the rose-apple tree (*jambu*-tree) where the young Buddha practised meditation before he left his palace.[10]

The difficulties in interpreting Buddhist visual art can also be illustrated by a relief at the east gateway at Sāñcī *stūpa* 1. This relief has been interpreted by

[7] Huntington, *The Art of Ancient* ..., p. 99.
[8] Huntington, "Aniconism and the Multivalence ...", p. 139.
[9] Huntington, *The Art of Ancient* ..., p. 99.
[10] More about the writings of Susan Huntington in chapter 1.6.1.



Fig. 4. Indexical sign pointing to the Buddha leaving *Trāyastriṁśa* heaven. *Bodhivṛkṣa*, *āsana*, ladder and *buddhapāda*. Bhārhut *stūpa*, 1st century BC. Entrance pillar, western gate. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Alfred Foucher,[11] Heinrich Franz,[12] Vidya Dehejia[13] and others as a depiction of Aśoka and his visit to the *bodhivṛkṣa*. However, this relief has subsequently been reinterpreted by Dieter Schlingloff. He believes that it is Māra and not Aśoka in the relief. For him the relief signifies the presence of the Buddha and nothing else.[14]

These examples point to the complex relationship between literature and visual art in Buddhism. An obvious example of the danger of only using literature as a way to read visual art can be seen from the stone slabs depicting the soles of the feets of the Buddha (*buddhapāda*). In the *Mahāpadāna sutta* (DN

[11] J Marshall, A Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñcī* (Delhi: Swati Publications, 1982 (1940)) Vol. 1 , p. 212.
[12] H G Franz, *Buddhistische Kunst Indiens* (Leipzig: VEB E A Seemann, 1965), pp. 39–40.
[13] V Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art. Visual Narratives of India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997), p. 39.
[14] D Schlingloff, "Aśoka or Māra? On the Interpretation of some Sāñcī Reliefs", *Indological and Buddhist Studies. Volume in Honour of Professor J. W. de Jong on his Sixtieth Birthday.* Edited by L A Hercus et. al. 2nd Edition (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1984), pp. 441, 450–451.



Fig. 5. Indexical sign pointing to the Buddha leaving the palace. Sāñcī *stūpa* 1, east gateway, late 1st century BC or early 1st century AD. From: J Marshall, A Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñcī*. Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1940. Vol. 2, pl. 40, 2.

II:16)[15] and the *Lakkhaṇa sutta* (DN III:143)[16] there are descriptions of the 32 major physical characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of the Buddha. On the soles of his feet there appears a thousand-spoked wheel, but nothing is written about the *svastika*, *triśūla* and *śrīvatsa* that also have been depicted on the soles. Thus, literature and visual art do not always correspond with each other.

We learn from the short survey above that it is possible to interpret reliefs from early Buddhist art in several different ways and that it is difficult to know exactly which interpretation is the final one. It seems possible to find evidence for different interpretations in one and the same relief. One picture may be interpreted in different ways by different people. The same picture may also be interpreted in several different ways by one and the same person. The pictures may even have been deliberately created to be interpreted in several ways. Vidya Dehejia has in several publications pointed to the multiplicity of meanings in early Buddhist art.[17]

1.1.2 Purpose of this Study

Iconology interprets the meaning of visual art in relation to the cultural and historical context in which it appears. Erwin Panofsky identifies three stages in iconological studies. The first is the *pre-iconographical description* which is

[15] [*Dīgha-Nikāya*]. *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part 2, Translated from the Pali of the Dīgha Nikāya by T W and C A F Rhys Davids (London: Pali Text Society, 1977 (1921)), p. 14.
[16] [*Dīgha-Nikāya*]. *Dialogues* ..., Part 3, pp. 137–138.
[17] V Dehejia, "Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems", *Ars Orientalis* 21 (1991), pp. 45–66. Dehejia, *Discourse in Early* ..., pp. 36–54. More about the writings of Vidya Dehejia in chapter 1.6.3.

concerned with identifying the pure forms of a piece of art.[18] The second is the *iconographical analysis* which connects artistic motifs with themes or concepts and identifies motifs, stories and allegories.[19] Finally, there is the *iconological interpretation* which deals "... with the work of art as a symptom of something else" with "intrinsic meaning or content".[20] My interests correspond with this third and important stage. I will uncover the underlying religious ideas, social conventions, notions and behaviour that have affected early Buddhist visual art.

However, it is not enough to interpret visual art as a symptom of something else. It is also important to realize that there is a complex connection between visual art in religions and other religious expressions. Visual art may affect other aspects of religious life as well. It is only when we know this that we will fully recognise the origin and development of Buddhist aniconic art.

We have seen in the short survey above that there have been controversies about how to interpret Buddhist aniconic art. This is to a certain extent due to the fact that Buddhist visual art has often been interpreted in relation to texts. We will see later that the relation between visual art and literature in Buddhism is fairly complex. Therefore, it is not my intention to enter into discussions about separate pictures and identification of motifs, stories and allegories on them. This has already been done by others and I am sure that it will continue to be done for a long time to come.

In short, the purpose of this study is to:

(1) present Buddhist aniconic art in a historical context,
(2) critically examine scholarly interpretations of Buddhist aniconic art,
(3) formulate an alternative interpretation of Buddhist aniconic art.

1.1.3 Outline of the Dissertation

In chapter 1 I will introduce the study, make some methodological reflections and present previous research. I will in chapter 2 discuss the assumption that there was a prohibition against making images of the Buddha or that some kind of doctrine prevented the Buddhist from making images of the Buddha. Thereafter, I will use chapter 3 to interpret the assumption that Buddhist meditational practice was the origin of Buddhist aniconic art.

I will in chapter 4 concentrate on a couple of Buddhist sites and districts, Sāñcī, Andhradeśa, Bhārhut, Bodhgayā, Sārnāth and Gandhāra. At all these sites there are aniconic symbols in different styles and at different stages of progress. Archaeological remains at each site will be used in order to establish a preliminary chronology of aniconic signs. This chronology will be necessary to disclose the origin and specific nature of Buddhist aniconic art. In short, I

[18] E Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962 (1939)), p. 5.
[19] Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* ..., p. 6.
[20] Ibid., pp. 7–8.

will in this chapter show that there is a line of development from simple auspicious signs to careful narrative compositions representing the Buddha without depicting him anthropomorphically.

In order to understand the origin of this development I will in chapter 5 concentrate on the questions of whether the early signs on Buddhist *stūpas* were part of a shared sacred Indian culture. Thereafter, in chapter 6 I will concentrate on a couple of these signs, examine their origin and see how they have been incorporated and transformed into a Buddhist context. It is in the development of Buddhist cultic practice connected with the *stūpa* that we might be able to find the scene of the development of aniconic art. Therefore, in chapter 7 I will concentrate on the *stūpa* and examine a couple of different phenomena that may have been reflected in the development of Buddhist aniconic art. In chapter 8 I will emphasis the auspiciousness of the Buddha as a continuation and intensification of the auspiciousness that characterized Buddhist cultic sites and their art. Finally, I will also discuss briefly the differences between iconic and aniconic Buddhist art.

1.2 Terms and Definitions

1.2.1 Aniconism

The definitions of the term *aniconism* by Burkhard Gladigow in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* assume a cultic context. He defines aniconic cults as cases where no images are known or accepted as objects of worship, especially not in the form of anthropomorphic images.[21]

Tryggve Mettinger enlarges this definition by making a distinction between *material aniconism* with aniconic symbols and *empty-space aniconism*, which refers to a completely empty room.[22] The cult is also important in Mettinger's definition and if the cultic context is not clear he does not use the word *aniconism*. Instead, he calls it *aniconic tendencies*.[23]

The term *aniconism* has also been used in the field of Indian art. Here the terms *iconic* and *aniconic* are often used "... to indicate the presence or absence of the anthropomorphic image of the deity".[24] In Robert L Brown's opinion, *aniconism* in early Buddhist art "... means only the absence of the human-figured Buddha".[25] There is however, no agreement about the term *aniconism* and its use. Often the term is avoided, and the art is only described

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[21] B Gladigow, "Anikonische Kulte", *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*. Bd. 1. Hrsg. H Cancik (Stuttgart, 1988), p. 472.
[22] T Mettinger, *No Graven Image?. Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995), p. 19.
[23] Loc. cit.
[24] R L Brown, "Narrative as Icon. The Jātaka Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture", *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*. Edited by J Schober (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), pp. 107–108n. 86.
[25] Brown, "Narrative as Icon ...", p. 108n. 86.

like this: "... the master is never represented in human forms, but only by symbols, ... these symbols represent the actual presence of the Buddha".[26]

Eva Balicka-Witakowska also avoids the term *aniconism* when describing early Christian art from Ethiopia.[27] The Holy Christ is not depicted in human shape in some old Ethiopic evangeliaria. Even if the soldiers are depicted anthropomorphically at Golgata, Christ is only represented by an empty cross combined with the lamb.

Susan L Huntington uses the term only when she is arguing against the existence of "... the so-called aniconic symbols".[28] As she denies that the Buddha is represented by aniconic signs, she does of course not use the term in her analysis of Buddhist art. In an article from 1991 Vidya Deheija uses the word *aniconic* when describing how the Buddha is represented without his physical presence.[29] Later, however, she discards the term. Instead, she prefers to use the term *index*.[30] See chapter 1.2.2 for her distinction between index, icon and symbol.

Aniconism in this study corresponds to what Mettinger calls *material aniconism,* with the exception that it also includes *empty thrones*, which in his view belongs to the category of *empty-space aniconism*. I will not follow Mettinger's distinction between *aniconism* and *aniconic tendencies*.

Aniconic art can mean non-figurative art. Here in Buddhist art it means the absence of the human-figured Buddha, otherwise the art is fully figurative. Furthermore, the term does not indicate any universally valid principle of aniconism.

1.2.2 The Concept of Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic Signs

In this study the concept *sign* is used in its broadest sense, consisting of a sign vehicle connected with meaning.[31] The meaning is only relevant in a specific cultural context. There may be some individual differences, but the limits are set by social conventions.

Vidya Dehejia[32] and Tryggve Mettinger[33] both refer to Charles Sanders Peirce and his distinction between *icon*, *index* and *symbol*. This distinction seems useful even if it is not always completely clear. It may help us to describe pieces of art without being bound up with the artists' intention or the beholders' different interpretations. Dehejia uses the distinction because it

[26] A Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1985 (1927)), p. 31.
[27] E Balicka-Witakowska, *La Crucifixion sans Crucifié dans l'art éthiopien. Recherches sur la survie de l'iconographie chrétienne de l'Antiquité tardive*. Bibliotheca nubica et aethiopica 4 (Warszawa: Zaś Pan, 1997 (1993)).
[28] Huntington, "Early Buddhist Art ...", p. 402.
[29] Deheija, "Aniconism and the Mulitvalence ...", p. 48.
[30] Deheija, *Discourse in Early* ..., p. vii.
[31] For a discussion of the concept of sign see: W Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 79–91.
[32] Deheija, *Discourse in Early* ..., pp. 36–37.
[33] Mettinger, *No Graven Image?* ..., pp. 21–22.

seems to fit her theory. In this study I will use this distinction mainly as a means to describe the artefacts.

When looking at a painting, the image is a sign of something else. The mental image that the beholder or reader[34] of the sign shapes in her or his mind is called by Peirce the *interpretant*. This interpretant points to an object, which may be different for each beholder. The beholder is the main actor and it is only in the act of interpretation that art becomes art. This process, which is called infinite semiosis, is constantly shifting.[35]

(1) An *icon* relates to its referent by resemblance.[36] Pictures are representations of this kind.[37] According to Dehejia the "... non-figural iconical sign makes direct reference to the sacred site ...".[38]

(2) An *index* relates to its referent by its existential connection.[39] Peirce gives as an example a bullet-hole in a piece of mould. The bullet-hole can be seen as an indexical sign for the shot. Another examples that he gives is that a rolling gait can be seen as an indexical sign for a sailor.[40] It has also been described as the physical manifestation of a cause and as a direct pointer to that object.[41] For Dehejia the indexical sign points to the presence of the Buddha.

(3) Finally, a *symbol* is a sign that relates to its referent by convention.[42] The symbolic sign refers to Buddhist ideals, according to Dehejia. She gives examples of the seat beneath the tree, the wheel or the wheel-crowned column, and the *triratna*. She believes that they may be interpreted as symbolic signs referring to the wisdom of enlightenment, the truth of the doctrine and the threefold emphasis on the Buddha, *dharma* and *saṅgha*.[43]

In this study an *iconic sign* refers to something that it resembles in appearance. An *indexical sign* points to a special object by a cause or a physical trace. Finally, a *symbolic sign* serves as a vehicle for a conception. An example of an iconic sign can be seen in fig. 3. The tree, the empty throne etc. represent a sacred Buddhist site. An indexical sign can be seen in fig. 1. The tree, the empty throne etc. point to the presence of the Buddha. Fig. 11 is an example of an symbolic sign referring in the Indian cultural surroundings to prosperity and good fortune. It is obvious that the demarcations between the three categories cannot always be clear. It should also be noted that a sign may consist of a combination of two or three of these categories.

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[34] I will henceforth use the term *beholder* even if it is more usual to use the term *reader* in semiotic studies.

[35] M Bal & N Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History", *The Art Bulletin* 73.2 (1991), p. 188.

[36] S Bann, "Semiotics", *The Dictionary of Art*, vol 28. Edited by J Turner (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 396–397.

[37] C S Peirce, "The Icon, Index, and Symbol", *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Vol. 2, Edited by C Hartshorne & P Weiss (Cambridge: Harward University Press, 1932), pp. 157–158.

[38] Dehejia, *Discourse in Early* ..., p. 37.

[39] Bann, "Semiotics ...", pp. 396–397.

[40] Peirce, "The Icon, Index ...", p. 160.

[41] Deheija, *Discourse in Early* ..., pp. 37, 41.

[42] Bann, "Semiotics ...", pp. 396–397.

[43] Deheija, *Discourse in Early* ..., pp. 51–52.

The three concepts, icon, index and symbol, will make it possible to describe Buddhist aniconic art without being dependent on the artist's or beholder's different intentions and interpretations. To study the transformation of this art it is important, however, to have in mind the contexts in which this art was made. What makes an indexical sign and not an iconic sign a symbol of the Buddha? It is certainly not the appearance of the sign itself. Instead, an indexical sign is pointing to the Buddha if many people understand it to be a Buddha from the context within which it appears. There must be some kind of relationship between the sign and the thing it is pointing to. The cross is the symbol of Christianity by convention and common understanding, not because of the crucifixion. Likewise, a trident is not a symbol of Buddha, *dharma* and *saṅgha* by its appearance. We can call it a symbol if many Buddhists connect it with the things it is said to symbolize. Therefore, this study will follow George Dickie when he says, "symbols are context dependent".[44]

Important questions regarding symbols in Asian traditions have been raised by Jane Duran[45] and Gérard Fussman.[46] As far as possible this study will avoid such analysis that goes beyond the cultural context in which a symbol appears. Symbolic associations will not be used in the same way as Adrian Snodgrass used them. He is unconcerned about whether a particular symbolic association is present in the minds of those who construct or venerate a given *stūpa*. He believes that the meaning of the *stūpa* is inherent in the form itself.[47] Instead, this study presupposes the importance of the connection between signs and conventions held by artists, sponsors and beholders. The symbolic context in this study is the Buddhist cult practice in India in pre-Gupta time.

1.2.3 Visual Narratives

To describe different ways of depicting visual narratives, I will use a couple of technical terms borrowed from Vidya Deheija.

Monoscenic narratives depict a single event in a story.[48]

Continuous narratives depict successive events of an episode, or successive episodes, of a story within a single enframed unit, repeating the figure of the protagonist in the course of the narrative.[49]

Synoptic narratives depict multiple episodes from a story within a single frame, but there is no consistent or formal order of representation with regard to either causality or temporality.[50]

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[44] G Dickie, *Introduction to Aesthetics. An Analytic Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 110.

[45] J Duran, "The Stupa in Indian Art. Symbols and the Symbolic", *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36.1 (1996), pp. 66–74.

[46] G Fussman, "Symbolisms of the Buddhist *Stūpa*", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 9.2 (1986), pp. 37–53.

[47] A Snoddgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stūpa. Studies on Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 9.

[48] Deheija, *Discourse in Early* ..., pp. 10–11.

[49] Ibid., p. 15.

[50] Ibid., p. 21.

Conflated narratives depict multiple episodes from a story within a single frame, but the figure of the protagonist is conflated instead of being repeated from one scene to the next.[51]

1.2.4 Bodhi-tree (*bodhivṛkṣa*) and Seat (*āsana*)

Śākyamuni Buddha is not the only *buddha* connected with a *bodhivṛkṣa*. Therefore, in this study the term *bodhivṛkṣa* does not distinguish between the *buddha* with which it is connected.

A kind of rectangular stone platform like an altar is a central and important sign in most of the reliefs in this study. It is nearly always placed in front of a *bodhivṛkṣa*, a wheel or a wheel-pillar (*cakrastambha*). In some reliefs, especially in *Amarāvatī* and *Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, it looks more like a seat and not as an altar. It is not the place here to distinguish between whether it is the throne that arose on the spot where the Buddha was seated or if it is an altar that is depicted. The term *seat* (*āsana*) will therefore be used for a rectangular stone platform as long as no further specification of its function is needed.

1.3 Methodological Reflections

1.3.1 Religion or Philosophy?

Ever since Buddhism began to be discussed in the West opinion has been divided as to whether Buddhism should be regarded as a philosophy or as a religion. Scholarly attention has also been divided between studies principally devoted to philosophical abstract ideas or, on the other hand, everyday religious life. The angle of approach determines already from the beginning much of the result. Nobody can deny that the philosophical systems of Buddhism are an important part in Buddhist religion, and so also is the Buddhist cult. The basis for this study is the cultic everyday religious life of Buddhism, of which Buddhist art is a part. Art, ritual, dogma and philosophy mutually interact and it is in this interaction that we shall search for religious changes and developments.

1.3.2 Monastic-Lay Division

One of the most influential studies in recent times for the understanding of Buddhist history was done in the field of Christian tradition. It is a book written by Peter Brown about the cult of saints in Latin Christianity.[52] This thin

[51] Ibid., p. 25.

[52] P Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

little book has influenced such scholars as Gregory Schopen,[53] Reginald A. Ray[54] and Kevin Trainor[55] among others. It is Brown's questioning of the two-tiered model of the "... potentially enlightened few ... [and] ... the vulgar",[56] which has been so important for the continuing study of Buddhism. Instead of a two-tiered model of Buddhism, consisting of the monastic-lay division, Ray proposes a threefold model which also contrasts the settled monastic lifestyle with the solitary life in the forest. Thus, he proposes three types of Buddhists, forest renunciants, settled monastic renunciants and laypeople.[57]

It may look like a slight difference, but in fact it has had widespread consequences. The two-tiered model has often led to a view of monks and nuns and their role in history that has taken shape from regulations and expectations, not from facts known about their behaviour. Textual evidence has often been taken as normative for the life of monks and nuns. The monastic-lay division has emphasised the monks' ambition of religious enlightenment on the one hand and laypeople as only searching for merit and a better life after death on the other. In anthropological studies it is easy to find examples of monks who do not fit the normative example and it has been easy for scholars to condemn them for not following the strict and pure orthodoxy.

This monastic-lay division has also been questioned by Peter Masefield[58] in his attempt to see Buddhism as a religion of divine revelation. He tries, from the earliest stratum of the canonical writings, to show that there is not only a social division between laypeople and the clergy, but a spiritual division of the Buddhist world. The main spiritual difference goes between those holding the right view (*ariyasāvaka*) and those who have not heard the *dharma* (*puthujjana*).[59] Among those of the right view (*ariyasāvaka*) were a large proportion of lay men and women,[60] while many monks and nuns were not regarded as having the right view.[61]

The two-fold division, monastic-lay or great-little tradition, has also been criticized for a long time by those working with contemporary religion. Peter Schalk, in his study about the *paritta* ritual from 1972 discussed this two-fold division. He points out that it is not possible to identify "das Streben nach Lebenssicherung" with the little tradition and "das Streben nach dem Seden-

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[53] G Schopen, "On Monks, Nuns, and 'Vulgar' Practices. The Introduction of the Image Cult into Indian Buddhism", *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks. Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), pp. 238–239.
[54] R A Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India. A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 36n. 1, 38n. 29.
[55] K Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism. Rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravāda Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1–2.
[56] Brown, *The Cult* ..., p. 17.
[57] Ray, *Buddhist Saints* ..., p. 434.
[58] P Masefield, *Divine Revelation in Pali Buddhism* (Colombo: Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, 1986).
[59] Masefield, *Divine Revelation* ..., pp. 3–4.
[60] Ibid., pp. 9–12.
[61] Ibid., pp. 21–24.

heil" with the great tradition without emphasizing the reciprocity between them.[62] The great and little tradition is only a conceptual model. It is not "als eine Beschreibung der Wirklichkeit aufzufassen".[63]

Without elucidating the above analyses in detail, we can establish the fact that the monastic-lay division has been questioned. Its overestimation has led to such assumptions that worship of the *stūpa* in the early period was only the concern of the laypeople[64] and that the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism was dependent on the laypeople alone.[65]

1.3.3 Interpreting Buddhist Visual Art

It has since long been taken for granted that it is Buddhist literature that can give us the clue to the original Buddhist religion. When Buddhist texts became accessible to Western scholars, actual ritual behaviour of Buddhists was no longer so important and a selection of texts was given priority.[66] The difficulties of using Buddhist literature have, however, been pointed out by several scholars. Rune E A Johansson has highlighted the generalizations that are the results of the "... small number of quotations that appear again and again, while hundreds of others always pass unnoticed".[67] In some anthologies and standard handbooks it is the same passages of texts that are presented over and over again, despite the immense amount of literature available in translation.[68]

The primacy of literary textual sources compared with archaeological and epigraphical sources has been closely questioned in recent years by Gregory Schopen.[69] Those texts used to make up what has become considered as "real" Buddhism by Buddhist scholars, may not even have been known to the vast majority of practising Buddhists.[70] Scholars of Indian Buddhism, Schopen notices, "... have taken canonical monastic rules and formal literary descriptions of the monastic ideal preserved in very late manuscripts and treated them as if

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[62] P Schalk, *Der Paritta-Dienst in Ceylon* (Lund: Lunds University, 1972), p. 240.
[63] Schalk, *Der Paritta-Dienst* ..., p. 246.
[64] A Hirakawa, "The Rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its Relationship to the Worship of Stupas", *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* No 22 (1963), p. 102. A Hirakawa, "Stupa Worship", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 14, Edited by M Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), p. 93.
[65] A Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism. From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990), p. 259. E Lamotte, "Mahāyāna Buddhism", *The World of Buddhism. Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture*, Edited by H Bechert and R Gombrich (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), p. 90. E Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism. From the Origins to the Śaka Era* (Lovain: Institute Orientaliste, 1988 (1958)), p. 81.
[66] See also1.4.1.
[67] R E A Johansson, *The Psychology of Nirvāna* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 9.
[68] Today this situation has been changed. See for example *Buddhism in Practice*, Edited by Donald S Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Included in this collection of Buddhist texts are ritual manuals, folktales, prayers, sermons, pilgrimage songs and autobiographies.
[69] G Schopen, "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism", *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks. Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), pp. 1–22.
[70] Schopen, "Archaeology and Protestant ...", p. 2.

they were accurate reflections of the religious life and career of actual practising Buddhist monks in early India".[71] Schopen gives three examples where scholars relied more on Buddhist literature then actual evidence. The examples are whether monks possessed private property, the doctrine of *karma* and the disposal of dead monks. Schopen points out that there is evidences from all periods that individual monks or nuns did possess private property. Buddhist scholars have ignore this evidence and only believed written regulations about how it ought to be. They treated the archaeological and epigraphical evidence as later changes or as evidence of a decline within the tradition.[72] Apparently, we cannot only trust written sources if we are at least a little interested in actual Buddhist everyday religious life. This is also important in the studies of Buddhist visual art. The art itself must, of course, be regarded as a first hand source.

Texts provide only a limited and sometimes even a misleading perspective on a religion. Besides the need for archaeological and epigraphical evidence, the importance of visual art and material culture must be stressed. John E Cort has stated this clearly regarding understanding of Jainism: "Two centuries of textual studies have led to an academic understanding of Jainism as an ascetic, world-renouncing, unaesthetic religious tradition. That such an understanding is clearly inadequate is an inescapable conclusion from a careful viewing of the material evidence".[73] Visual art in itself is a valuable source of information and conveys specific meanings to the spectators. It does not only illustrate written documents. There is a complex connection between written texts and visual art. This has also been expressed recently by Jacob N Kinnard in a study about visual art in medieval India.[74]

Much scholarly attention has through the years been used to interpret visual art from Buddhist literature. Buddhist scholars today have knowledge from texts that the majority of the Buddhists living in ancient India never had. They tend to project an overflow of knowledge into early Buddhist art. Written texts were very valuable and there were probably many monasteries that only had a few texts in their possession. When the Chinese pilgrim Faxian travelled through India in search of *Vinaya* texts, he did not find any written copies in north India which he could transcribe.[75] An oral tradition beyond the texts was probably alive in early post-Aśokan time. We can therefore never know what individual Buddhist monks, nuns and laypeople "saw" when they were looking at the art surrounding the *stūpas*. They no doubt had a Buddhist worldview quite different from that of today's scholars.

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[71] Ibid., p. 3.

[72] Ibid., pp. 3–5.

[73] J E Cort, "Art, Religion, and Material Culture. Some Reflections on Method", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64 (1996), p. 631.

[74] J N Kinnard, *Imaging Wisdom. Seeing and Knowing in the Art of Indian Buddhism* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), pp. 12–24.

[75] Faxian, *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms. Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fa-Hien of his Travels in India and Ceylon (AD 399–414) in Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline*. Translated and annotated by J Legge (New York: Paragon Books, 1965 (1886)), p. 98.

Dieter Schlingloff has in detail pointed out the different ways visual art and literature approach the dimension of time. Visual objects are fixed in time, contrary to events in narrative literature which succeed one another in time. He pointed out that any artist who wants to present a narrative in pictorial form is confronted by the question of how he can capture the continuous action in a static picture. This was not only true for artists in India. In all cultures and at all times, artists have been confronted by the same problems.[76] There is no need in this study to discuss the different ways artists have solved this problem in Sāñcī, Bhārhut, Amārāvāti and elsewhere. For the sake of simplicity, I will in chapter 4 use a couple of technical terms borrowed from Vidya Deheija to describe specific artefacts (see 1.2.3). Robert L Brown, however, has pointed out that visual art sometimes has to do with concerns other than the attempt to tell a linear story. In visual art it is possible to arrange events by principles other than a narrative through time. Events can, for examples, be arranged in spatial or geographical terms.[77]

1.3.4 Interpreting Meditative Practice

Does a pure mystical experience exist or do all mystical experiences depend on social and cultural settings? Steven Katz, one of the foremost upholders of what has been called constructivism, maintains that there is no pure mystical experience.[78] He believes that mystical experience is shaped and formed from the very start by the tradition within which the mystic works. For this statement he has been criticized by several scholars, but it is not my intention to join this debate.[79]

However, a few words about written sources and ways of interpreting meditative experiences and practices are important for this study. Robert H Sharf has published a paper about interpreting meditative experiences which is provocative in its intention. He points out that texts such as *Visuddhimagga* are not based upon personal experience, but are the result of scholarly interpretation by monks of formidable learning.[80] He points out clearly his view that meditation experiences are dependent on the social and cultural setting. Sharf's opinion is that written handbooks on meditation often functioned as prescriptions of what to experience, rather then real descriptions of actual mental experiences. He seems even to believe that they do not guide in the practice of Buddhist meditation. "They functioned more as sacred tal-

[76] D Schlingloff, "Narrative Art in Europe and India", *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings. Identifications and Interpretations* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988), p. 227.
[77] Brown, "Narrative as Icon ...", pp. 67–68.
[78] S T Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism", *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, Edited by S T Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 26.
[79] B Janz, "Mysticism and Understanding. Steven Katz and his Critics", *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 24 (1995), pp. 77–94.
[80] R H Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience", *Numen* 42 (1995), pp. 236, 239.

ismans than as practical guides".[81] Even if Buddhaghosa did practice meditation, we can be quite sure that his *Visuddhimagga* is a compendium made from his study of available literature, foremost *Vimuttimagga*, and not from his own personal experiences. Indeed, much of Buddhist meditation is determined by its social and cultural setting. However, modern comparative physiological and behavioural studies agree on the point that there exist universal altered states of consciousness, which can be accessed through meditation.[82]

Therefore, we have to be careful when using written sources on meditation to examine meditation practice. It is important to remember to what purpose they were written and that the texts consist of writings that should not be considered as personal testimonies. The earliest sources of information on Buddhist meditation are preserved in the canonical writings of different Buddhist schools. However, the Pāli canon gives only limited information about the actual practice of meditation. This information must have been transmitted mainly by oral tradition.

There are two post-canonical manuals of Buddhist doctrines, the *Vimuttimagga* and the *Visuddhimagga*, which give more details of how meditation should be practised. What the meditator had in his mind during the meditation is mostly concealed even in these manuals.

Coming back to Sharf, he rightly points out that those contemporary Buddhist movements that emphasize meditative experience (foremost *vipaśyanā* and *zen*), turn out to be movements that were highly influenced by the West,[83] but when he describes meditation prior to that time, he refuses to see it as real meditation. He classifies it as devotional practices intended to accumulate merit. Meditation "consisted largely of the recitation of Pāli texts pertaining to meditation ... chanting verses enumerating the qualities of the Buddha, reciting formulaic lists of the thirty-two parts of the body, and so on".[84] In defining *meditation* I will instead follow Alan Sponberg,[85] Lance Cousins[86] and Ria Kloppenborg[87] and see it in its broadest possible sense, including a variety of mental practices and meditative techniques. The term *meditation* should therefore include both such activities that can be called devotional contemplation and at the same time those mental activities, like *vipaśyanā*, by which one gains insight into the nature of existence. Sharp rightly points to the devotional nature of early Buddhist meditation, but he does not seem to

[81] Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism ...", p. 241.
[82] D Brown, J Engler, "The State of Mindfulness Meditation. A Validation Study", *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 12.2 (1980), p. 187.
[83] Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism ...", p. 232.
[84] Ibid., p. 242.
[85] A Sponberg, "Meditation in Fa-hsiang Buddhism", *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, Edited by P N Gregory, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 4 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986), pp. 37–39.
[86] L Cousins, "The Origins of Insight Meditation", *Buddhist Forum* 4 (1996), p. 41.
[87] R Kloppenborg, R Poelmeyer, "Visualizations in Buddhist Meditation", *Effigies Dei. Essays on the History of Religions*. Edited by D Van Der Plas (Leiden: Brill, 1987), pp. 83–84.

realize that devotion is an essential part of meditation. Peter Schalk has emphasized that even the practice of *paritta* recitation may function as a kind of devotional meditation.[88]

1.4 The Study of Buddhism and Buddhist Art

1.4.1 The Beginning of Buddhist Studies in the West

The modern discovery of Buddhism and Buddhist art by the West that began during the first half of the 19th century can be divided into two distinct periods. In the first period, up to the middle of the 19th century, it was a living religion in a foreign land that reached Europe through accounts of journeys by travellers, missionaries and diplomats. During that period there was no exact knowledge about what distinguished Buddhism from other Asian religions.

The second period is characterized by a textualization of Buddhism. Travellers brought Buddhist texts back with them and the first academic studies of Buddhism were literary studies carried out mainly in libraries, archives and oriental institutes in the West.[89] In 1844 Eugène Burnouf published his *Introduction à l'histoire du Buddhisme indien*, which may be seen as the foundation for the academic study of Buddhism.[90] Burnouf pointed out the importance of textual studies in the history of Buddhism and he largely based his *Introduction* on Sanskrit texts, but he was also aware of the importance of Pāli for the study of Buddhism.[91] From the middle of the 1870s many Pāli texts were edited and studied and it became generally accepted that Pāli Buddhism was older than *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. Both T W Rhys Davids[92] and Hermann Oldenberg[93] stressed the importance and reliability of Pāli sources. In 1881 the Pali Text Society was founded for the purpose of the study and publication of Pāli texts.[94]

Buddhism had become a textual object and the scholars of the West were searching for the "Ur-Buddhismus". However, what they actually were doing was putting themselves in the position of creating an ideal Buddhism of the past. This representation of the ideal Buddhism as rationalist and free of rituals was to a large part prompted by the Orientalist's expectations and wishful thinking. As Charles Hallisey said, "... the exclusion of ritual from early Bud-

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[88] Schalk, *Der Paritta-Dienst* ..., pp. 215, 230.

[89] P C Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 12–13.

[90] Almond, *The British Discovery* ..., pp. 25–26. E Burnouf, *Introduction à l'histoire du Buddhisme indien* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1844).

[91] Almond, *The British Discovery* ..., pp. 25–26.

[92] T W Rhys Davids, *Buddhism. Being a Sketch of the Life and Teaching of Gautama the Buddha* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1903 (1877)).

[93] H Oldenberg, *Buddha. Sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* (Berlin, 1881).

[94] J W De Jong, *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America*. 2nd Revised & Enlarged Edition (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1987), pp. 23–24.

dhism and thus, ... from the very nature of Buddhism, was also key to Orientalist claims regarding their ability to recover the Buddha's true message".[95] The insignificant part rituals had in original Buddhism according to the Orientalists, is clearly seen in the writings of Rhys Davids. Most part of his book *Buddhism* from 1903 deals with the life of the Buddha and the doctrines and morality of Buddhism.[96] Ideal Buddhism could then be compared with Buddhism in the present, in other words with the people over whom the West held colonial control. From the middle of the 19th century contemporary Buddhism was often seen as being in a general state of decay. When Alexander Cunningham, Samuel Beal, Bishop Bigandet and others compared contemporary Buddhism with an idealized textual Buddhism, they found that it had degenerated.[97]

Even authors outside the scholarly study of Buddhism drew attention to Buddhism. Most wellknown of these were Friedrich Hegel and Arthur Schopenhauer. Hegel is not known for his interest in India, but from 1822 until his death 1831 he studied translations available during his time and was genuinely fascinated by Indian thought.[98] Influences taken from Indian philosophies can more clearly be seen in the writings of Schopenhauer. He proclaimed the concordance of his philosophy with the teachings of Vedānta and Buddhism. However, his knowledge of Buddhism has been questioned.[99]

It was not only texts that aroused interest from the early scholars. Studies of inscriptions started at the same time and it was foremost the inscriptions of Aśoka that were of greatest interest. The search for inscriptions was one of the reasons why many Buddhist monuments were discovered and described.[100] Another reason, probably not less important, was the search for antiquities and treasures. Archaeological and epigraphical sources were however not used to any greater extent in creating an ideal Buddhism of the past. It was the written texts that had priority, not the visual artefacts.

1.4.2 Contributions from Indian Archaeology

The history of archaeology in India can be divided into the period before and after Sir John Marshall. Even if he has been criticized in modern times, he must be considered as the founder and organizer of modern archaeology in India. Before him most archaeological activities were undertaken by army officers and officials of the East India Company. James Prinsep, James Fergu-

[95] C Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravāda Buddhism", *Curators of the Buddha. The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, Edited by D S Lopez Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 46.
[96] Rhys Davids, *Buddhism ...*
[97] Almond, *The British Discovery ...*, pp. 37–40.
[98] W Halbfass, *India and Europe. An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 85–99.
[99] Halbfass, *India and Europe ...*, pp. 106–120.
[100] De Jong, *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies ...*, p. 34.

son, Alexander Cunningham and James Burgess are four names closely associated with Indian archaeology of the 19th century. At that time, however, the hunt for antiquities, religious relics and hidden treasures existed alongside a real search for early historical evidence.

Not only did Marshall undertake important excavation projects, he was also a great organizer and leader of the *Archaeological Survey of India* (ASI). The work of excavating had been in the hands of Provincial Governments, which the Director General of ASI could advise but not guide.[101] Marshall's predecessor, Lord Curzon, worked very hard to strengthen ASI's position and was successful. Marshall continued his work and what today is the ASI is highly indebted to him. The principles that still govern preservation activities in India originate from the work of Marshall. He reacted against conservation work that did more harm than good to some of the ancient buildings. For Marshall it was much more important to save what was left from further injury or decay, than to restore and reproduce what had been destroyed. This was especially the case with the older Buddhist, Hindu and Jain edifices. Limited restoration of the more modern erections of the Muslims was justified on the grounds that the art of the original builders was still a living art.[102] The criticism against Marshall is foremost that the methods he used when excavating sites were not always free from fault, that he ignored natural stratification and depended mostly on artificial levelling when fixing the inter-relations of the different phases of an excavated site.[103]

Thus, the prime motivation of the early explorers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was to discover objects that would grace a museum rather than to discover evidence that would lay bare a civilisation. It was first with Sir John Marshall that archaeological excavations in India began to use modern scientific methods. Much what was done before that time has unfortunately destroyed the stratigraphy and the possibility of later doing more careful excavations.

1.4.3 Indian Art seen from the West

1.4.3.1 Indian Art as Inferior to Western Art

Studies of inscriptions became important as a complement to the textual studies and the search for inscriptions was one important reason why many Buddhist monuments were discovered and described. Even if Westerners, who spent a large part of their lives in India investigating ancient monuments during the 18th and 19th centuries, had a great interest in what they where doing, they brought with them a Western view about India and its art. As Philip Almond has said, "discourse about Buddhism provides ... a mirror in which

[101] S Roy, *The Story of Indian Archaeology 1784–1947* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1996 (1961)), p. 84.
[102] Roy, *The Story of Indian* ..., p. 96–97.
[103] Ibid. p. 112.

was reflected an image not only of the Orient, but of the Victorian world also".[104]

Some of the Orientalists had a tendency to constantly judge Indian art by Western standards. Classic Greek and Roman art were the basis when forming a judgement about Indian art. What was held as good Indian art was sometimes considered as having derived from Western classical tradition or having been made by imported artisans from the West. In 1874 Henry Cole wrote that the "exceptional excellence of the Sanchi bas-reliefs suggest that Greek masons, or possibly designers, may have been called in to assist the great work."[105] It was commonly believed that fine art was not present in India at all. All India could offer was craft, not fine art. "The monstrous shapes of the Puranic deities are unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic representation; and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown, as fine arts, in India".[106] If there was fine art in India it was at that time and in those places that were influenced by the West. "... some of the scenes from Buddha's life, in which he is represented in purely human shape without any ritualistic disfigurement, are of great beauty".[107] All later art was inferior to the golden age that was derived from the Western classical tradition. Art in India was in a state of decline, from the art of classical influences to the monstrous contemporary Hindu art. Thus, Indian art was either regarded as inferior to Western art or was considered as magnificent and grandiose because of its classical origin.

1.4.3.2 The Background to the Western Images of Indian Art

Partha Mitter has convincingly demonstrated the background to this Western image of Indian art. Western ideas about Asia in medieval times and earlier consisted to a great extent of myths and fables about monsters and demons. This idea of monstrous Indian art was, according to her, mainly derived from existing travel accounts and a medieval literary tradition. The early travellers were dependent on expected images derived from the medieval conception of the world. In this world-view it was commonly believed that the eastern part of the world was inhabited by several kinds of monsters and demons. She points to the fact that "by the late medieval period an elaborate and in many ways frightening imagery of demons and hell had grown up, consisting of elements from diverse sources".[108] According to her, it was two traditions that were mainly responsible for shaping these beliefs in much maligned monsters. The first tradition was derived from classical sources. The view about India that survived throughout the greater part of the Middle Ages in myths and legends

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[104] Almond, *The British Discovery* ..., p. 6.
[105] H H Cole, *Catalogue of the Objects of Indian Art Exhibited in the South Kensington Museum* (London, 1874), p. 2.
[106] G C M Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India*. Part 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1884), p. 125.
[107] Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts* ..., p. 125.
[108] P Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters. History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 10.

derived ultimately from Greek authors. One popular legend in the Middle Age was the legend of the marvels Alexander had encountered in India.[109] These myths and legends consisted of the Greeks' own constructions of strange and fantastic beings, some of which were believed to live in the East. Especially those multi-armed monsters, which bear a physical resemblance to Indian gods, were believed to inhabit the East. The people of the Middle Age inherited a large number of monsters from classical Greek mythology.[110]

The second tradition, according to Mitter, must have been derived from the medieval Christian conception of hell. The Christian church taught that all pagan gods were demons and that they attacked souls and tempted them. There also existed a close link between hell imagery and apocalyptic literature in the medieval period, where the Antichrist was actually identified with a dragon.[111]

These two traditions, the classical one of the monstrous races and the Christian one of demons, converged at some stage in medieval history and became an important influence on Western notions about Asia.[112] These medieval demons or monsters served as models for the travellers to the East and they already had this view in their minds before they left. What they saw on the trip was always seen with these medieval eyes, and medieval eyes were expected to see monsters and strange creatures. Once back home it must had been easier for them to reproduce the expected images of India instead of presenting examples contrary to the commonly accepted notion, especially if they wanted to be believed. These myths and fables about monsters and demons in the East were an essential part of the background to explaining why some Westerners in the 18th and 19th century saw Indian art as something strange and inferior to Western art. If there was good Indian art it was believed that it must have had its origin in the Western classical world.

1.4.3.3 The Defence of Indian Art

At the beginning of the 20th century there was a reaction against the view of Indian art as inferior to Western art. The fore figures in the reaction were Ernest Binfield Havell and Ananda K Coomaraswamy. They were deeply impressed with romantic ideas about distant and exotic places such as India, China and Egypt. Their thoughts must be seen as a reaction against the former view of Indian art as strange and monstrous. The year 1910 was a turning point in the history of the British understanding of Indian art. It was the year Sir George Birdwood made a public pronouncement on the absence of fine art in India. He said, "... a boiled suet pudding would serve equally well as a symbol of passionate purity and serenity of soul"[113] about a Javanese Buddha image. This

[109] Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters* ..., p. 6.
[110] Ibid., p. 7.
[111] Ibid., pp. 9–10.
[112] Ibid., p. 10.
[113] Ibid., p. 269.

gave rise to a defence of Oriental art by Roger Fry. A *Letter to the Editor* was published by *The Times* and signed by thirteen British intellectuals and artists in defence of Indian art. In the same year the Indian Society was founded by Coomaraswamy and others to promote the study of Indian art and culture.[114]

Ananda K Coomaraswamy was born 1877 in Ceylon to a British mother and a Tamil father. His father died early and Coomaraswamy was brought up and educated in England. His circles of friends were late-Victorian intellectuals and he became a member of the Arts and Crafts movement early in his life. In 1917 he moved to America and settled in Boston and New York and worked as a curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He had friends among both the Theosophist and Jungians and as time went on he became a harsh critic of Western society. However, he constantly tried to exclude these ideas from his art-historical writings. The writings of C G Jung were of great interest to him and they corresponded and exchanged their publications.[115] It is not too much to say that in his writings we can identify influences from Jung and the psychoanalytical currents that were popular at that time. His friend, Henrich Zimmer, was to an even greater degree influenced by Jung.

Coomaraswamy's interest was not only directed towards Indian art, but also to the art tradition in Europe. He called attention to the similarities between medieval art in Europe and Indian art, and he put them in sharp contrast to post-medieval art in Europe. Traditional religious cultures have more in common with each other than they have with the modern West. He glorified the past and the traditional societies that he believed were like pre-renaissance medieval Europe. It was in those traditional societies that the purest form of art was produced. It appeared to him that art in traditional societies might be one of the principal means by which culture was transmitted. The distinctive feature of traditional art is, according to Coomaraswamy, that it is symbolic and an expression of a religious conception of life. The traditional artist is also normally anonymous.[116] In traditional societies "... there is no hard line drawn between the secular and the religious things in life; religion is not so much a formula, as a way of looking at things, and so all the work of life may be a sacrament, may be done as it were unto the Lord".[117]

The religious dimension of Indian art was however not new. For example Birdwood wrote in 1884 that "... every thought, word, and deed of the Hindus belongs to the world of the unseen as well as of the seen ; and nothing shows this more strikingly than the traditionally arts of India. Everything that is made is for direct religious use, or has some religious significance".[118] Birdwood

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[114] R Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy. His Life and Work*, Bollingen Series 89 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 53.
[115] Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy* ... p. 203.
[116] A K Coomaraswamy, "The Christian and Oriental, or True, Philosophy of Art" *Why Exhibit Works of Art?* (London: Luzac, 1943), pp. 52–53.
[117] A K Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989 (1909)), pp. 45–46.
[118] Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India* ..., p. 2.

wrote it in a lightly patronizing style. It is not unlikely that Coomaraswamy could have said the same thing, but in a much more positive way.

The background of Coomaraswamy and his friends can be found in the German romantic tradition. India was a source of wisdom, an original state of harmony and a place not destroyed by the civilisation for the German romantics in the second half of the eighteenth century. This romantic tradition was to a great extent a literary tradition with Johan Gottfried Herder as one of its pioneers.[119] It is not totally wrong to considered F Hegel, the famous philosopher, as part of the German romantic movement, despite his critique of it. What distinguished Hegel's approach from that of the romantics is above all his commitment to the present and his sense of an irreversible direction of history. He did not glorify origins and early stages like the romantics. Instead he considered that the spirit of world historical progress was towards greater richness and complexity.[120] Every nation had for Hegel a preordained place in the historical process and India and Indian art was for him only a piece in his philosophy and world-system. The *national spirit* represented for Hegel something unique for a culture, nation or race. It was only through this national spirit that art could be understood.[121]

1.4.3.4 The Origin of the Buddha Image

One of the most controversial questions regarding Buddhist art has been the questions about the origin of the Buddha image. There was a hostile debate at the beginning of this century about whether the first image of the Buddha was created as a result of western influences, or if it has its origin in the Indian soil. This was a question that Coomaraswamy and his friends were strongly engaged in. In 1852 sculptures from Gandhāra were for the first time described as exhibiting Greek attributes. But it was not until 1870, when G W Leitner brought a collection of Gandhāran sculpture to Europe and coined the term "Graeco-Buddhist" for them, that scholars became aware of this Buddhist art with Greek features.[122] James Ferguson was one of the first to suggest that the idea of making a Buddha image in anthropomorphic form was inspired by the tradition of Western image making.[123] It was however Alfred Foucher who most strongly advocated the idea of a Greek source for Gandhāra art and that the oldest Buddha images from Gandhāra were made by Greek artists.[124] Some scholars however suggested that there had been Roman rather than Greek influences on Gandhāra art, because classic Greek art was earlier than Gandhāra art.

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[119] Halbfass, *India and Europe* ..., p. 69.
[120] Ibid., p. 85.
[121] Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters* ..., p. 210.
[122] S K Abe, "Inside the Wonder House. Buddhist Art and the West", *Curators of the Buddha. The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, Edited by Donald S Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 70–72.
[123] J Ferguson, *Archaeology in India* (Delhi, 1884), p. 36.
[124] A Foucher, *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art and other Essays in Indian and Central-Asian Archaeology* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1917), pp. 111–137.

Victor Goloubew was the first to openly claim, in a review in 1923 in the *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Éxtrême Orient*, that extant images in central India predated those of Gandhāra.[125] It was however Ananda Coomaraswamy who was the most eloquent spokesman of a theory that supported the primacy of Mathurā in the invention of the Buddha image.[126] His long article *The Origin of the Buddha Image* came many years after the beginning of the controversy.[127] At the beginning of this century Coomaraswamy together with E B Havell questioned much of what the established scholars had thought. They rejected the application of classical standards to Indian art and instead insisted that it was necessary to study Indian art using indigenous standards. Havell, who was an English artist and the principal of the Calcutta School of Art, criticized the established academic discipline and argued that it was necessary to comprehend the philosophical, religious and mythical ideas in order to understand Indian art. He also expressed the importance of understanding the artist's purpose.[128] Coomaraswamy expressed similar views to Havell, but with a much greater substance to his words and elaborated them into an important theory.

The debate about the geographical origin of the Buddha image did not end with Coomaraswamy. In 1951 W W Tarn strongly emphasized Gandhāra as the origin of the Buddha image.[129] He based his argumentation on a single coin with a human figure seated cross-legged. This coin belongs to the reign of Maues in the middle of the 1st century BC. His identification of the figure with the Buddha is highly questionable and has not had many followers. Tarn identified a horizontal line to the right of the figure as part of a seat. Others have identified this line as a sword.

Adalbert J. Gail is also of the opinion that the first image of the Buddha was created in Gandhāra. However, he does not consider the creation of the first Buddha image as being different from other Indian gods. Instead, he believes that "the development of the image of Śiva, Viṣṇu and his circle, Durgā, Indra, Kārttikeya and many others, as well as of the Buddha and Jina, took place in the period between 50 BC and 50 AD. It was substantially inspired by the Greek-Hellenistic spirit which used the human form as the criterion for the divine one".[130]

As late as 1981 van Lohuizen-de Leeuw pointed out her long-held view that "the workshops at Mathurā were the first to create representations of the

[125] Abe, "Inside the Wonder House ...", p. 81.
[126] Ibid., p. 82.
[127] A K Coomaraswamy, "The Origin of the Buddha Image", *Art Bulletin* 9 (1927), pp. 287–317.
[128] M F Linda, "Zimmer and Coomaraswamy, Visions and Visualizations", *Henrich Zimmer, Coming into His Own*, Edited by M H Case (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 126.
[129] W W Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria & India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 397–408.
[130] A J Gail, "On the Beginning of Figurative Representation in Indian Art", *South Asian Archaeology 1991. Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe Held in Berlin 1–5 July 1991.* Edited by A. J. Gail and G. J. R. Mevissen (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993), p. 434.

Buddha in human form".[131] In her article she examined a group of very early Gandhāra reliefs which show striking similarities to the so-called Kapardin type of Buddha from Mathurā. Therefore, she concluded that images of the Buddha were exported to the North-West and copied by local artists. In this article she did not discuss the Maues coin pointed out by Tarn.

A K Narain, however, agreed with Tarn that the seated figure on the Maues coin did represent a Buddha or a Bodhisattva.[132] Contrary to Tarn, Narain points out that this does not favour Gandhāra as the birthplace of the Buddha image. Maues ruled in the area north of Gandhāra before he entered into the Takṣaśilā region. Narain believes that it was the Sarvāstivadins in the Swat Valley and Kashmir that produced the first Buddha image. He is of the opinion that the period between Maues (circa 95-75 BC) and Kaniṣka (AD 78) was a period of trial and error before standardization took place both in Mathurā and Gandhāra.[133]

In a PhD dissertation about Buddhist iconometry and iconography from 1975, Chandra Wikramagamage put forth the opinion of Mauryan India or Laṅkā as the origin of the Buddha image. He concluded, from written sources only, that the origin of the Buddha image was as early as the 3rd century BC. "The Sri Lankan artists, possibly, learned to make the Buddha image from Mauryan artists long before the emergence of so-called Greeco-Buddhist School".[134]

It is my firm conviction that the last word has not yet been said. New archaeological evidence may change our opinions. In short, what we know so far is that images of the Buddha were produced in both Gandhāra and Mathurā at the beginning of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty. We need more evidence before we can establish that the images of the Buddha were made before that time.

1.5 Previous Research about Buddhist Aniconic Art and its Origin

1.5.1 The Beginning

It is commonly believed that Albert Foucher was the first to express the theory of aniconism in Buddhist art. He published an influential article 1911 in *Journal Asiatique*. He maintained that before the creation of anthropomorphic im-

[131] J E van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, "New Evidence with Regard to the Origin of the Buddha Image", *South Asian Archaeology 1979. Papers from the Fifth International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe held in the Museum für Indische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen Preussischer Kultursesitz Berlin*. Edited by H. Härtel (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1981), p. 394.

[132] A K Narain, "First Image of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. Ideology and Chronology", *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia*. Edited by A K Narain (New Delhi: Kanak Publications, 1985), pp. 7–16.

[133] Narain, "First Imge ...", p. 11.

[134] C Wikramagamage, *Principles of Buddhist Iconology* (Polgasovita, Sri Lanka: Academy of Sri Lankan Culture, 1997), p. 129.

ages of the Buddha the ancient stone-carvers of India represented "the life of Buddha without Buddha".[135] His idea was however not totally new. In 1868 James Ferguson suggested that a trident together with the feet of the Buddha might stand for the Buddha. He wrote, "... if the first person of the Triad [the Buddha] was represented on the monuments at all, it must have been by some emblem".[136] This is however no complete aniconic theory. As the title of his book indicates, he does not believe that worship in front of a tree should be interpreted as worship of the Buddha, but simply as worship of a sacred tree.

A few years later, however, Alexander Cunningham expresses it more clearly. He wrote "... a large wheel ... a symbol which here takes the place of Buddha himself ... and thus becomes an emblem of Buddha the Teacher".[137] In a catalogue from the Indian Museum in Calcutta John Anderson in 1883 expressed a similar view when discussing the newly arrived railings from the Bhārhut *stūpa*. He was of the opinion that "... the tree must be regarded as having an unseen Buddha seated beneath it ...".[138] This view, he tells us, had been proposed by Samuel Beal in 1874. "The more I study these groups the more I am convinced that the altar, so called, represents the seat or throne on which Buddha was seated under the Bo tree when he arrived at complete enlightenment, and that the people engaged in worship are in part worshipping Buddha, although not represented by any figure ...".[139] Rhys Davids also aired similar views. In 1903 he wrote, "... in these old sculptures the Buddha himself is never represented directly, but always under a symbol".[140] Thus, before Foucher established the aniconic theory, the ideas were already in the air. But it was Foucher who caused it to be accepted by scholars of his time.

1.5.2 Foucher—Souvenirs from Sacred Sites

The reason why Buddhist artists did not make images of the Buddha was, according to Foucher, that "... it was not the custom to do it".[141] He denied the idea that there was a prohibition on making images in early Buddhism. Buddhism developed, contrary to Christianity and Islam, in a world unaffected by worship of images. Vedic texts neither speak for or against worship of images. He believed that this was because the idea of it "... had not even presented itself to the Indian mind".[142]

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135 Foucher, *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art ...*, p. 4.

136 J Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship. Or Illustrations of Mythology and Art in India in the First and Forth Centuries after Christ from the Sculptures of the Buddhist Topes at Sanchi and Amaravati* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1971 (1868)), p. 106.

137 A Cunningham, *The Stūpa of Bharhut. A Buddhist Monument Ornamented with Numerous Sculptures Illustrative of Buddhist Legend and History in the Third Century B.C.* (London: Allen and Co., 1879), p. 90.

138 J Anderson, *Cataloque and Hand-book of the Archaeological Collection in the Indian Museum, Part 1, Asoka and Indo-Scythian Galleries* (Calcutta: The Trustees, 1883), p. 65.

139 Anderson, *Cataloque and Hand-book ...*, pp. 65–66.

140 T W Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1903), p. 103.

141 Foucher, *The Beginning of Buddhist Art ...*, p. 7.

142 Ibid., p. 9.

It was pilgrimage to Buddhist holy sites that started the custom of making aniconic images of the Buddha, according to Foucher. The four most prominent places for Buddhist worship were connected with events in the life of the Buddha. These places became associated with symbols of these events. Kapalivastu became associated with lotus flowers, Bodhgayā with the *bodhivṛkṣa*, Sārnāth with the wheel and Kuśinagara with the *stūpa*. Foucher believed that Buddhist pilgrims, when visiting the four great holy places brought small souvenirs connected with the sites back home, or brought them as votive offerings when visiting the sites.[143] It was obvious to him what the *bodhivṛkṣa*, the wheel and the *stūpa* were connected with. It is not obvious which symbol was connected with Kapilavastu, the birthplace of the Buddha. However, according to Foucher the nativity and birth of the Buddha was already from the earliest times connected with lotus flowers.[144]

Foucher's view must be seen together with his theory about the first appearance of the Buddha image. The Indian mind was not able to produce images used for worship. It was the Hellenized sculptors of the north-west, in Gandhāra, that started to make images of the Buddha. As soon as the Buddha image had been made in Gandhāra, the idea swept over traditional India and changed the art radically.[145]

Lamotte is of the same opinion as Foucher about the origin of aniconic art. He pointed out that the simplest and most rational explanation seems to have been supplied by Albert Foucher.[146] Alex Wayman also concurs with the opinion that aniconic art appeared from the four main pilgrimage places and that pilgrims brought back symbolic souvenirs from these four places.[147]

1.5.3 Mus—Survival from Monsoon Asia

Paul Mus also was a follower of Albert Foucher in that he strongly emphasized the influences that the great pilgrimage sites had on early Buddhist art. In the sixties he started to write a book on Angkor, but it was not finished before his death in 1969. One chapter of this unfinished text has recently been published and in it he tries to connect the art of 12th century Khmer empire with early Buddhist aniconic art.[148]

Aniconism was for Mus not a matter of dogma. Instead, it was a matter of artistic propriety and the beholders' cultic appearance at the monuments. He points out that aniconic reliefs should be seen in connection with their monu-

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143 Ibid., p. 11.

144 A Foucher, *On the Iconography of the Buddhs's Nativity*. Memoirs of the Archeological Survey of India, 46 (Delhi: ASI, 1934), p. 8.

145 Foucher, *The Beginning of Buddhist Art* ..., pp. 22–25.

146 Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism* ..., p. 406.

147 A Wayman, "Aniconic and Iconic Art of the Buddha", *Untying the Knots in Buddhism. Selected Essays* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997), pp. 166–171.

148 P Mus, "The Iconography of an Aniconic Art", *Res. Anthropology and Aesthetics* 14 (1987), pp. 5–26.

ments. "The order and meaning of the monument illuminate the order and meaning of the bas-relief, and vice versa".[149] It is when the beholder circumumbulates the monument that he puts the finishing touches to the artistic work.[150]

To make trees, empty thrones and so on, as representing the Buddha was, according to Mus, borrowed from early Monsoon Asia.[151] We have to remember his view of early Asia to understand what he means with that. He believed that the inhabitants of ancient India, Southeast Asia and southern China, in pre-Aryan and pre-Chinese times, had a certain unity in their culture. The belief that spirits were present in all things and in all places was central to this culture.[152] In his opinion, it was from this non-Aryan culture that worship of trees and thrones representing something else was borrowed.

Mus starts his line of development with, what he calls primitive aniconism, real cult objects such as *bodhivṛkṣas* and wheels found on Buddhist sacred sites. The aniconic art that appears in the reliefs on the oldest *stūpas* is an obvious extension of these aniconic cult objects.[153] As a further development of aniconic art he points to images of the Buddha sitting in specific postures connected to the sacred sites. In images of the eight major events (*aṣṭamahāprātihārya*) from Pāla art, only one event is still represented aniconically. The sacred site in Kuśinagara is still sometimes only represented as a *stūpa.*[154] Thereafter, he also points out that the development of the five Jinas, or transcendental Buddhas, is derived from the aniconic art and the sacred pilgrimage sites.[155]

1.5.4 Lüders—Sacred Sites

The aniconic theory has not been unchallenged. Heinrich Lüders left unpublished material when he passed away in 1943. His work on the inscriptions at Bhārhut was not published until 1963. A relief on Prasenajit pillar depicting the building round the Bodhi tree represents, according to him, only the worship of the Bodhi tree and nothing else. "... there is absolutely nothing to indicate that the sculptors wanted to represent anything but the sanctuary of the Bodhi tree and its worship by divine and human beings".[156] About another similarly relief he wrote "... nine men, five on the left and four on the right side of the tree ... are represented offering garlands or bouquets, or showing their

[149] Mus, "The Iconography ...", p. 11.
[150] Loc. cit.
[151] Ibid., p. 13.
[152] P Mus, *India Seen From the East. Indian and Indigenous Cults in Champa*. Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, No. 3 (Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1975 (1933)), pp. 7–9.
[153] Mus, "The Iconography ...", p. 11.
[154] Ibid., pp. 18–19.
[155] Ibid., pp. 20–21.
[156] *Bhārhut Inscriptions*, Edited by H Lüders, Revised by E Waldschmidt and M A Mehendale. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. 2, Part 2 (Ootacamund: Archaeological Survey of India, 1963), p. 96.

veneration. These people are meant as human worshippers which suggests that the sculpture illustrates, not the enlightenment of the Buddha, but the worship of the Bodhi tree".[157] However, he did not build any all-inclusive theory, he only said that in Bhārhut there were no such representations.

1.5.5 Buddhologies

Doctrines about the nature of the body of the Buddha, buddhologies, have been referred to as explanations of aniconism. As the Buddha had entered *nirvāṇa* he could not be seen. This is one of the most common explanations why the Buddha was not physically depicted. In an article about Buddhist iconography in *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, we read that "... because the Buddha as a personality was deemed to have passed outside of history altogether at his *parinirvāṇa* or death, his presence was instead symbolized by such motifs as the rich turban of the prince Siddharta, the throne of the Blessed One, his footprints marked with the Wheel of the Law ... the begging bowl (*pātra*), or the Bodhi Tree".[158]

This is also the opinion of Dietrich Seckel.[159] It is not Śākyamuni who is worshipped in the *stūpa*; it is the idea of the dharma, the *dharma-kāya*. This dharma body could not be made in physical form. The explanation of aniconic art, according to Seckel, is "... his true nirvana essence, inconceivable in visual form and human shape".[160] Even before he had achieved enlightenment, and was still a Bodhisattva, he was never depicted in these early reliefs. Seckel believes that Śākyamuni was recognized as a Buddha already at this early period, and possessed no physical form in which he might be suitably portrayed.[161] In spite of the theory that the Buddha-nature had affected early Buddhist art, Seckel has very clearly pointed out that early Buddhist signs were not exclusively used by the Buddhists.[162] He also pointed out that it is possible to interpret signs in different ways.[163] Shailendra Kumar Verma is also of the opinion that the Buddha could not be represented in anthropomorphic form "since the real body of the Buddha was supposed to be the Dhammakāya".[164] Peter Harvey is of a similar opinion. He said, "... the profound nature of a Buddha could not be adequately conveyed by a mere human form".[165]

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157 *Bhārhut Inscriptions* ..., p. 82.
158 S Gaulier/R Jera-Bezard, "Buddhist Iconography", *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 7, Edited by M Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), p. 45.
159 D Seckel, *Jenseits des Bildes. Anikonische Symbolik in der buddhistischen Kunst* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1976), p. 7. *The Image of the Buddha*, General Editor D L Snellgrove (London: Serindia Publications, 1978), pp. 22–24.
160 *The Image of the Buddha* ..., p. 24.
161 Ibid., p. 22.
162 Seckel, *Jenseits des Bildes* ..., p. 9.
163 Ibid., pp. 27–30.
164 S K Verma, *Art and Iconography of the Buddha Images* (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1994), p. 16.
165 P Harvey, "Venerated Objects and Symbols of Early Buddhism", *Symbols in Art and Religion*. Ed. K Werner (London: Carzon Press, 1990), p. 68.

Speculations about the absence of the Buddha are a common topic among *Mahāyāna* philosophical tradition. In his investigation of Bhāvaviveka's concept about the meaning of emptiness, Malcom David Eckel analyses what it meant for an Indian intellectual to gaze on the figure of the Buddha and examine its meaning. He touches upon the subject of Buddhist aniconic art when he connects philosophical speculations from the 6th century about the absence of the Buddha with worship and pilgrimage at Buddhist sacred sites.[166]

1.5.6 Prohibitions on Making Images of the Buddha

The theory of Buddhist aniconic art has sometimes been closely connected with the notion that in the early history of Buddhism it was prohibited to make images of the Buddha. Just as the absence before 200 AD of identifiably Christian forms of art has supported the theory that the Christians must have been opposed to art, the absent of images of the Buddha in early Buddhist art has support the theory that it was not permitted to depict the Buddha. I will here only quote Prudence R Myer as a striking example. She writes of a Bhārhut relief that "... the Enlightened One himself is of course not seen, in accordance with the convention of the period which forbade the representation of his corporeal presence".[167] The reliability of this assumption will be discussed in the next chapter.

1.5.7 Buddhism and the Vedic Tradition

Several authors have emphasized Vedic traditions and their importance for the origin of Buddhism and Buddhist art. One reason for this interest is that the Vedic sun-god Sūrya is depicted at several Buddhist sites. E Benda calls attention to the fact that Buddhism arose from a Vedic environment. In his publication *Der vedische Ursprung des symbolischen Buddhabildes* he interpreted Buddhist art from Vedic texts that praise the sun-god Sūrya (Ṛgveda 1:115). His conclusion is that Buddhist aniconic art is a prolongation of Vedic traditions.[168] He believes that the double role of the sun-god Sūrya is reflected in the legend of Śākyamuni Buddha. Benjamin Rowland also suggested that Sūrya may have been used to symbolize the solar nature of the Buddha.[169] Later, Janice Leoshko suggested that Sūrya on a railing-pillar in Bodhgayā represent the enlightenment of the Buddha.[170]

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[166] M D Eckel, *To See the Buddha. A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
[167] P R Myer, "The Great Temple at Bodh-Gayā", *The Art Bulletin* 40 (1958), p. 282.
[168] E Benda, *Der vedische Ursprung des symbolischen Buddhabildes* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1940).
[169] B Rowland, "Buddha and the Sun-god", *Zalmoxis* 1 (1938), pp. 69–84.
[170] J Leoshko, "The Implications of Bodhgaya's Sūrya as a Symbol of Enlightenment", *Akṣayanīvī. Essays Presented to Dr. Debala Mitra in Admiration of her Scholarly Contributions*. Edited by G Ghattacharya (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1991), pp. 231–234.

Sūrya is the Vedic sun-god who drives a four-horse chariot across the canopy of heaven. Sūrya has a double role, he is both darkness and light. Benda believes that the same is reflected in the life of the Buddha. Sūrya is also the dispeller of darkness just as the Buddha later is described as the destroyer of ignorance by insight (*prajñā*).[171] We can in Bhājā[172] see Sūrya and his chariot driving over the body of a gigantic demon, just as later the Buddha is depicted defeating the demons at his enlightenment. According to Benda, the life of the historical Śākyamuni is merged with the nature of Sūrya.[173] The Buddhist signs, lotus, *cakra*, *stūpa* and tree, are also symbols of the consecration of Sūrya in *nakṣatrā*.[174] Later when Buddhism was established among the Śakas and Kuṣāṇas this old Vedic tradition slowly disappeared and the Buddha was depicted in human shape.[175]

Y Krishan also gave prominence to the fact that Buddhist art belonged to an common Indic tradition. He pointed out that in Jain art as well there is no anthropomorphic representation of any *tīrthaṅkara* in the earlier period.[176] He assumes that Jain and Buddhist art belonged to a common aniconic tradition. We can also find sacred trees, wheels and *stūpas* in Jain art. This common aniconic art primarily stems from the fact that neither the Buddhists nor the Jains wanted to have a radical break with the contemporary Vedic tradition.[177] He continued that "... early Buddhist [and Jain] art was a compromise between the emerging *bhakti* cult and Vedic nature worship, a desire to pay homage to and deify the *mahāpuruṣa* Buddha without violating the contemporary ideas of worship of metaphysical forces".[178]

1.5.8 Brown—Art with Iconic Function

In a recent article about visual representations of *Jātaka* stories in India and Southeast Asia, Robert L Brown follows Paul Mus when he points out the importance of looking at the whole monument, not only at individual reliefs. Visual art at Buddhist monuments was created for quite different purposes. He assumes that visual art is not present at the monuments to tell stories but has an iconic function. He points out that Buddhist art was created as a way to manifest the Buddha at the actual place and not as a narrative to be read. His main argument is that art, and even narrative art, on *stūpas* does not seem to have been created to be looked at. The gateways at Sāñcī are approximately eight and a half metre high, and it is impossible to see the details on them standing

[171] Leoshko, "The Implications ...", p. 232–233.
[172] B Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India. Buddhist, Hindu, Jain.* 3rd Revised Edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), fig. 36.
[173] Benda, *Der vedische* ..., p. 58.
[174] Ibid., p. 62.
[175] Ibid., p. 65.
[176] Y Krishan, *The Buddha Image. Its Origin and Development* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1996), p. 26.
[177] Krishan, *The Buddha Image* ..., p. 16.
[178] Ibid., p. 17.

on the ground.[179] Instead of being illustrations of a word text, they were according to Brown made as "iconized word texts"[180] and the meaning "is found in the context of the monuments",[181] not in the context of the word texts. His main intention is probably to point out that visual art on *stūpas* was not intended to tell a linear story. Instead, in visual art it is also possible to arrange events by principles other than a narrative through time. Joanna Williams has questioned his view that reliefs at *stūpa* 1 in Sāñcī are not intended to be looked at. She points out that "... almost all carvings on the uppermost lintels are more formulaic than those on the lower lintels".[182] The most carefully made reliefs at *stūpa* 1 in Sāñcī are, in her view, those at eye level on the gateway-pillars.[183]

1.5.9 Coomaraswamy—Meditation as the Origin of Indian Art

1.5.9.1 Indigenous Sources

The assumption that Indian art had a close connection with yogic and meditation traditions can be traced back to the beginning of 20th century.[184] Coomaraswamy held the view that meditation was an important practice in creating art in India. To understand why he came to that conclusion we have to look more closely at his thinking. Already in his first book, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, published in 1908, he pointed to the importance of using indigenous sources. He added a translation of an old traditional *śilpa* text known as *Śāriputra* in his publication.[185] This text deals with the dimension and shape of Buddha images. Similar texts had actually already been published in 1834 by a young south Indian called Ram Raz. Coomaraswamy was not the first after Ram Raz to use traditional indigenous sources, but constantly throughout his life he stressed more then anybody else the importance of expounding Indian art from the Indian point of view. This he did in sharp contrast to the generation before him who, more often than not, forgot the living artistic tradition and traditional indigenous sources still existing in India.

Coomaraswamy called attention to the connection between art and meditation in several of his writings. The "pure art" he found in traditional societies was not the expression of the individual artist, but it was inspired by the divinity or by an abstract idea. "The craftsman is not an individual expressing individual whims, but a part of the universe, giving expression to ideals of eternal beauty and unchanging laws ...".[186] Art "... represents a purely mental

179 Brown, "Narrative as Icon ...", pp. 68–74, 99–100.
180 Ibid., p. 99.
181 Loc. cit.
182 J Williams, "On Viewing Sāñcī", *Archives of Asian Art* 50 (1997–98), p. 95.
183 Williams, "On Viewing ...", p. 95.
184 A Coomeraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, 3rd Edition (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979 (1908)), p. 153.
185 Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* ..., pp. 154–163.
186 Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman* ..., p. 48.

activity ..."[187] in the mind of the artist. To come in contact with the divinity or the ideal mentality, the artist in Indic tradition practised yoga or meditation. In 1918 he wrote, "The practise of visualization ... is identical in worship and in art. The worshipper recites the *dhyana mantram* describing the deity, and forms a corresponding mental picture, and it is then to this imagined form that his prayers are addressed and the offerings are made. The artist follows identical prescriptions, but proceeds to represent the mental picture in a visible and objective form, by drawing or modelling".[188]

1.5.9.2 Art and Meditation

What did Coomaraswamy base his notions on? As early as 1908 he referred to *Śukranīti*,[189] a mediaeval Indian treatise on statecraft. In this text there is a passage dealing with the making of images.[190] Concentration carried out by the artist is here compared with yogic concentration and the text prescribes that the "imager should meditate"[191] in order to bring the form of the image in his mind. In 1918 he made a new translation of the same passage[192] and in 1934 he came back to *Śukranīti* once again.[193] He pointed out that the text also makes it clear that "the lineaments (*lakṣaṇa*) of images"[194] are made on purpose to be used in the "practice (*yoga*) of visual-formulation (*dhyāna*)".[195] Thus, in the *Śukranīti* it is pointed out that an artist should meditate before he starts to make an image. It is also stated in the same text that the purpose of making images is to use them in meditation.

The *Śukranīti* is the main text Coomaraswamy referred to concerning meditation and art. He also mentioned a text called *Abhilaśitārthacintāmaṇi* where it is related that the painter should "put down on the wall that has been seen in contemplation".[196] Even when he talked about Buddhist art he had only this non-Buddhist text, *Śukranīti*, that strengthen his opinion. He had not a single Buddhist example to clarify his statement. It is remarkably that a text like *Bimbamāna*,[197] an iconometrical text full of details about how to make Bud-

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[187] A K Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (New York: Dover Publcations, 1956 (1934)), p. 5.
[188] A K Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva. Fourteen Indian Essays*, Revised Edition (New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1968 (1918)), p. 27.
[189] *The Śukranīti*. Translated by B K Sarkar (New York: AMS Press, 1974). The text is also known as *Śukranīti of Śukracārya*.
[190] Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* ..., p. 153.
[191] Loc. cit.
[192] Coomeraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva* ..., p. 26.
[193] Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* ..., pp. 113–117.
[194] Ibid., p. 113.
[195] Loc. cit.
[196] A K Coomaraswamy, "The Nature of Buddhist Art" *Coomaraswamy. Selected Papers, Traditional Art and Symbolism*. Edited by R Lipsey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977 (1938)), p. 164.
[197] *Bimbamāna* is a Buddhist handbook (*śilpa*) about the iconometry of Buddha images. Coomaraswamy refers to the same text under the namn *Śāriputra*.

dha images, does not even mention meditation.[198] It is not my purpose in this chapter to solve this question, but the silence from Buddhist texts may be explained by the fact that meditation was a matter of course in artistic activity and not worth mentioning. What is important here is that the fact remains that Coomaraswamy had to use a non-Buddhist text when he tried to convince his audience that meditation is an essential part of Buddhist art.[199] It is, however, important to realise that Coomaraswamy was a participant in a heated debate and he had to find the best arguments against what he considered was a narrow-minded colonial view.

Coomaraswamy was looking for something genuinely and obviously Indian to explain the specific nature of Indian art. For him it was not necessary or even desirable to distinguish between Buddhism and other religious traditions in India or between meditation and yoga. His purpose was to find the nature of Indian civilization and put it in sharp contrast to Classical Western civilization. This search for a specific Indian mentality was a sound reaction against an old obsolete ideology, but it had a romantic, non-historical view of art, as if it were taken from the words of Hegel or Jung. This view gives of course a simplistic picture of Indian society and lacks a historical background.

I do not deny that there is a close connection between art and meditation and that Coomaraswamy made an immense contribution to the understanding of Indian art. We must, however, not forget that his theory was derived from his romantic view of the specific Indian mentality and that it came into existence as a reaction against the disparagement of Indian art that was common at the beginning of the 20th century.

1.5.10 Schlingloff—Meditation as the Origin of Buddhist Aniconic Art

1.5.10.1 Introduction

Dieter Schlingloff has a specific aniconic theory. We have seen that Albert Foucher was of the opinion that souvenirs from sacred places started the practice of making aniconic representations of the Buddha. Schlingloff disagrees on this point. Instead, he strongly emphasises meditation as the origin of early Buddhist art. He has pointed to the connection between art and meditation in several of his publications.[200] According to him, "such symbols, easily pro-

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198 The Bimbamāna of Gautamīyaśāstra. As Heard by Śāriputra, Edited and translated by E W Marasinghe (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1994). The text is also edited and translated into German in H Ruelius, *Śāriputra und Ālekhyalaksaṇa, Zwei Texte zur Proportionslehre in der indischen und ceylonesischen Kunst* (Göttingen: H Ruelius, 1974).

199 Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* ..., p. 153.

200 D Schlingloff, "Die Bedeutung der Symbols in der altbuddhistischen Kunst", *Hinduismus und Buddhismus. Festschrift für Ulrich Schneider*, Hrsg. H Falk (Freiburg: Hedwig Falk, 1987), pp. 310–328. D Schlingloff, *Om buddhabildens uppkomst* (Uppsala: Unpublished Manuscript, Uppsala Universitet, Department for the History of Religions, 1990). D Schlingloff, "The Oldest Painting of the Main Events in the Life of the Buddha", *Studies in Ajanta Paintings. Identifications and Interpretations* (Delhi: Ajanta Publ., 1988), p. 3.

duced signs that originally served to aid meditation on the Buddha (*buddha-anusmṛti*), were taken over by the early artists and made the focal point of their portrayals of events in the life of the Buddha".[201]

We have seen that it was Ananda Coomaraswamy who first connected Indian art with meditation and *yoga*. His view, however, was based more upon wishful thinking and a belief about an Indian mentality, than on actual facts and research. It is evident that Dieter Schlingloff is in some respects influenced by Coomaraswamy. However, it is important to understand that Schlingloff in his writings gives us something totally new and quite different. It may be enough to mention that he uses Buddhist sources and not only considers the Indian mentality as an overall origin to all Indian art. Schlingloff's theory is essential because it is a serious and original attempt to understand early Buddhist art and therefore requires closer study. He believes that simple signs, like a tree, a wheel or a *stūpa*, were used as objects in meditation at an early period. These signs were, according to him, taken over by the artists and used when they began to portray events in the life of the Buddha.[202]

1.5.10.2 The Reciprocity between Visions of the Buddha and Buddha Images

Schlingloff points out that there is a correspondence between painted Buddha images and visions of the Buddha experienced through meditation.[203] He exemplifies this effect from descriptions taken from a manual of meditation. The Buddha is here described in this way. His *uṣṇīṣa* emanates sapphire blue and his *ūrṇā* is white as the moon. The fingernails are red as ruby and the rest of the body emanates the colour of gold.[204] This shows clearly the correspondence between painted Buddha images and visions in meditation.

He exemplifies this reciprocity further with the great miracle at Śrāvastī. This event is one of the main stories in the life of the Buddha. A common way to depict it is in the form of a wall full of small Buddha images. This event is abundantly represented in the Buddhist caves at Ajanta.[205] Schlingloff points out that monks learned to create visions of the Buddha in a similar way to that in which the miracle at Śrāvastī was often depicted.[206] He bases this assumption on a Chinese meditation handbook (*Short Method of Meditation* T. 617). The meditator shall "... increase the number of Buddhas to ten, then to a hundred, then to a thousand, then to innumerable Buddhas".[207]

The correspondence between Buddhist art and meditation appears distinctly

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201 Schlingloff, "The Oldest Painting ...", p. 3.
202 Loc. cit.
203 Schlingloff, *Die Bedeutung* ..., pp. 317–318.
204 *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch*. Edited and Translated by D Schlingloff. Sanskritexte aus den Turfanfunden 7 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), p. 125.
205 Schlingloff, *Die Bedeutung* ..., p. 318.
206 Ibid., pp. 318–320.
207 Short Method of Meditation (T. 617), quoted in S Beyer, "Notes on the Vision Quest in Early Mahāyāna". *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems. Studies in Honor of Edward Conze*. Edited by L Lancaster. Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series 5 (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), p. 338.

in these two examples. Schlingloff makes it clear that it is not only a correspondence but also a reciprocal influence. It seems that he not only believes that meditational experiences are expressed in Buddhist art, but also that art is expressed in meditational experiences.[208]

1.5.10.3 Symbols at Two Different Levels in the Mind of the Meditator

The meditator concentrates on the object in such a way that a symbol for the object is created in his mind. The meditator can bring forth these symbols whenever he wishes, without any need of the object longer. The symbol in the mind of the meditator, called *aufgefasste Zeichen* by Schlingloff is transformed into a symbol of a higher stage. The symbol at the higher stage, called *sublimiertes Zeichen*, is the foundation for visions according to Schlingloff. Symbols at this higher level can be widened, multiplied and changed in several different ways.[209] These two different stages are taken from *Visuddhimagga* (VM 4:31). Schlingloff also refers to a summary made by Edward Conze of this passage in *Visuddhimagga*, where he calls the symbols at the two different levels for *grasped sign* and *sublimated sign*.[210]

1.5.10.4 Simple Signs Connected with the Life of the Buddha

The images of the Buddha are only one of many objects that have been used in meditation. Schlingloff points out that different notions from the Buddhist teachings are used as aids in meditation.[211] He gives us examples from the *Yogalehrbuch* and other texts of how simple symbols were used to represent notions from the Buddhist writings.[212] One example is water bubbles which may signify feelings[213] and a monkey which is said to signify thoughts,[214] etc. This symbolism was taken from the canonical writings. He continues that the life of the Buddha was in a similar way already an important object in meditation before he was depicted anthropomorphically.[215] Schlingloff states that there were symbols associated with the Buddhist teachings. These symbols became closely connected with events in the life of the Buddha. Simple signs such as a circle became associated with his first teachings, a rectangle represented his walkway, a stick with a circle at the top his enlightenment, etc.[216]

The artists did not change these simple shapes. They only refined them. Later, the artists enlarged these symbols with things associated with the narration. In this way Māra became a symbol of the enlightenment as clearly as the *bodhivṛkṣa*. Or, a deer relates as much about the first teachings of the Buddha as a wheel does. The well-informed Buddhist observer could easily recognize

[208] Schlingloff, *Die Bedeutung* ..., pp. 317–318.
[209] Ibid., p. 321.
[210] E Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), pp. 254–255.
[211] Schlingloff, *Die Bedeutung* ..., p. 322–323.
[212] Ibid., pp. 322–324.
[213] *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbudh* ..., p. 97.
[214] Ibid., p. 86.
[215] Schlingloff, *Die Bedeutung* ..., p. 326.
[216] Loc. cit.

these events.[217] In later periods images of the Buddha could be combined with the symbols concerned and could also replace them without loss to the message. This was no fundamental change with the tradition. The shape of the Buddha was already visible in the mind of the meditator. Whether it was a symbol or an image of his body was of no major importance.[218] Schlingloff inclines towards reducing the divergences between aniconic and iconic art.

1.6 The Modern Debate about Buddhist Aniconic Art

1.6.1 Huntington—Sacred Sites

In the middle of the eighties a new debate started about how to interpret Buddhist aniconic art. It was Susan L Huntington who gave rise to the debate. She propounded her point of view for the first time in 1985 in a monograph called *The Art of Ancient India*. In a comment on a relief with tree ladders usually identified as Buddha's descent from the Trāyastriṁśa heaven (fig. 4), she says, "this relief and others often given an aniconic interpretation are not aniconic at all. Rather, it might be suggested that the Buddhological message of many of the subjects depicted in early Buddhist art was not an emphasis on Śākyamuni Buddha or his life but rather related to other aspects of the religion".[219]

A review article by Pratapaditya Pal spares no pains in criticizing Susan Huntington. He writes "... it [*The Art of Ancient India*] is certainly not a landmark, nor is it a paradigm of careful scholarship and is neither comprehensive nor always comprehensible".[220] A clue to this negative view can be found if we pay attention to a book written by Pal himself, also dealing with early Buddhist art in India. His *Light of Asia* was published 1984, only a year before Huntington's book, but the two authors are of entirely different opinions about the interpretation of early Buddhist symbols. Pratapaditya Pal's view is the traditional one, that "... in early Buddhist art, Buddha Śākyamuni was invariably represented by a symbol".[221] It was explicitly stated by Pal that "... although the chair is empty and the pillar is placed behind it, the presence of the footprints on the footstool… clearly implies that the flaming pillar is meant to represent the Buddha".[222]

In 1990 Susan Huntington published her standpoint about aniconic art in a better worked-out article.[223] She stated that most of the symbols do not represent events in the life of the Buddha at all. Her alternative interpretation is that

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[217] Ibid., p. 328.
[218] Loc. cit.
[219] Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India ...*, p. 73.
[220] P Pal, "[Book review about *The Art of Ancient India* by S L Huntington]", *Arts of Asia* 17, 3 (1987), p. 129.
[221] P Pal, *Light of Asia. Buddha Śākyamuni in Asian Art* (Los Angeles: County Museum of Art, 1984), p. 132.
[222] Pal, *Light of Asia…*, p. 138.
[223] Huntington, "Early Buddhist Art ...", pp. 401–408.

the aniconic symbols portray worship and adoration at sacred Buddhist sites and the practices of pilgrimage associated with them. Foucher saw early on connections between aniconic symbols and pilgrimage. He did, however, see these symbols as evolving from souvenirs from the holy Buddhist sites, souvenirs that later became aniconic symbols of the Buddha. Lüders also interpreted some of the signs at Bhārhut as representing worship in front of a *bodhivṛkṣa* and not as a representation of the Buddha. Susan L Huntington went, however, a step further and created a whole theory about aniconism and pilgrimage.

Place and time are key issues in her interpretation. Some of the signs may depict devotions made at sacred sites while the Buddha was still alive, but most of them show the sites of worship after the lifetime of the Buddha. The Bhārhut relief (fig. 35) commonly identified as representing Bodhgayā is an example given by her. The temple we can see around the *bodhivṛkṣa* did not of course exist at the time of the Buddha. Aśoka is credited with having built the first important temple at Bodhgayā and therefore in her view the presence of the temple suggests that the depiction shows the site in the Aśokan period or later. In her view there is always only one place and one time depicted. This will be discussed later. She concluded her paper with a footnot saying that even if a few images are truly aniconic, the vast majority are not, and the role of aniconism has been vastly overemphasized.

1.6.2 Linrothe—An Artistic Problem

The article mentioned above by Huntington was accorded a great deal of attention and awakened conflicting emotions. In a review article Rob Linrothe questioned her theory. His main argument why the Buddha has been aniconically depicted, is the absence of images of the Buddha at such places as Sāñcī and Bhārhut. "Out of the hundreds of sculptural figures that survive from Bhārhut and Sāñcī, not a single one depicts Śākyamuni Buddha in the form which he was soon to take".[224] As far as I understand him, he means that there must have been visual expressions of the Buddha in early Buddhism. If no images were made of the Buddha at that time, some other signs must represent him. Therefore in his view, a wheel in these early reliefs can not be anything other than a symbol of the Buddha's first sermon.

He does however point out that Huntington's new interpretation and the traditional one need not always be mutually exclusive. "Some images might have been *both* depictions of events in the Buddha's life *and* devotions occurring at the site or re-enactments of it" (emphasis not added).[225] As we will see next, this article which was published 1993 is reminiscent of what Vidya Dehejia had written in 1991. According to Linrothe, his article was however written and submitted for publication before her article was published.

[224] R Linrothe, "Inquiries into the Origin of the Buddha Image. A Review", *East and West* 43 (1993), p. 249.
[225] Linrothe, "Inquiries into ...", p. 253.

1.6.3 Dehejia—Multiple Meanings

As a response to Huntington's theory, Vidya Dehejia wrote an interesting article in 1991.[226] There she expresses a different opinion to Huntington. Vidya Dehejia criticizes Huntington and emphasizes "... the multiplicity of meanings apparent in early Buddhist sculpture and painting…".[227] Among literary critics it is, according to her, axiomatic that a work may contain multiple layers of meaning. She wonders therefore why historians of early Buddhist art seem so curiously reluctant to accept a comparable conflation of meanings.[228] Her essay advocates the need to recognise, accept and even admire the multiplicity of meanings apparent in early Buddhist sculpture and painting in which the artist reminds the viewer of the manifold religious interpretations that may be suggested by any single emblem. A similar view had already been presented in 1976 by Dietrich Seckel.[229]

Dehejia is of the opinion that there are two critical and complementary prerequisites for the accurate interpretation of early Buddhist art. The first is an awareness of the *multiple meanings* conveyed by the major Buddhist emblems. Aniconic symbols may in fact be interpreted in three distinct and equally valid ways in different contexts and in varying visual compositions. These emblems may be read as (1) aniconic presentations of the Buddha, but they may also (2) represent sacred spots, or *tīrthas* and the devotions performed there. (3) These emblems are also to be viewed as attributes of the faith. Thus, the tree is intended to recall the divine wisdom of the Buddha, while the pillar suggests his sacred doctrine. The exact interpretation of the emblems depends on their visual context. In one panel, she proposes, the tree sheltering a seat may be an emblem that portrays the presence of the Buddha himself. In another panel it may stand for a hallowed pilgrimage site and yet in another panel the tree may be intended to recall the essence of the enlightenment.

The second crucial prerequisite for interpreting the emblems is according to her point of view to acknowledge their *multilayered significance*. The artist seemed to have intended a conflation of meanings. When the primary intention was to depict an event from the Buddha's biography, the artist often included a reference to the site as a *tīrtha*. For instance, the Bhārhut scenes of the Buddha's enlightenment on the Prasenajit pillar (fig. 35) include a shrine around the Bodhi tree that was not built until two centuries after the historical moment of the enlightenment. She also suggests that at the same time as an emblem refers to the presence of the Buddha, it may also refer to the truths that his life manifested. Most early Buddhist visual narratives contain this double layer of meaning and this conflation of meanings is surely intentional. As soon as we accept the validity of such system, with its accent on the fluidity of

[226] Dehejia, "Aniconism and the Multivalence ...", pp. 45–66.
[227] Ibid., p. 45.
[228] Loc. cit.
[229] Seckel, *Jenseit des Bildes* ..., pp. 27–30.

meanings, and cease to insist upon a single explanation to be applied at every instance, aniconism ceases to be such a vexed problem.

A couple of years later, Deheija devoted a whole chapter in her new book to look at the same problem.[230] Her standpoint is the same, but she uses a new terminology borrowed from Charles Peirce (see 1.2.2).

1.6.4 Huntington—A Reply

The article Deheija published in 1991 gave rise to a long reply from Susan Huntington in the next volume of the same journal.[231] She began her reply by explaining "... that I have never claimed nor intended to claim that there are no 'aniconic' works of art".[232] Her position is, however, that the theory of aniconism is not valid as an all-inclusive explanation of early Buddhist art of India. The vast majority of the reliefs that have been explained as aniconic scenes do not, in her words, "... portray substitutes for anthropomorphic representations of a Buddha".[233]

Susan Huntington agrees that there can be several meanings in one symbol, or emblems as Deheija says, but she denies that the artists deliberately tried to invest the sculptural compositions with multiple layers of meaning. On the contrary, Huntington believes that "... the compositions are intended to show a single, principal meaning but sometimes intrinsically carry with them additional layers of meaning as well".[234] She considers that the events and the Buddha's physical presence are an important part of a Buddhist site, but she does not believe that the devotees can see the Buddha at the sacred sites associated with him. Huntington's chief concern regarding Deheja's theory of multivalency is that Deheja does not distinguish deliberately intended multiple meanings from those that are naturally inherent in certain subject. Furthermore, she believes that layers of meanings may have been added over the course of centuries, and that the same motif does not convey the same meanings throughout its history.

1.6.5 In the Footsteps of Susan Huntington

We notice that Susan Huntington's innovative writing has been received with some interest and some scholars have obviously been influenced by her interpretation. A short but interesting article has been written by Karel R van Kooij.[235] He calls attention to the fact that the stone slabs or platforms we can

[230] Deheija, *Discourse in Early ...*, pp. 36–54.
[231] Huntington, "Aniconism and the Multivalence ...", pp. 111–156.
[232] Ibid., p. 111.
[233] Loc. cit.
[234] Ibid., p. 113.
[235] K R van Kooij, "Remarks on Festivals and Altars in Early Buddhist Art", *Function and Meaning in Buddhist Art. Proceedings of a Seminar Held at Leiden University, 21–24 October 1991*, Edited by K R van Kooij and H van der Veere (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), pp. 33–43.

see in front of the *bodhivṛkṣa* in many of the reliefs at Sāñcī and Bhārhut should not be regarded as thrones or seats. Instead, he believes that they are altars. He uses the term *maṇḍa* or *mañca* for these altars, as opposed to thrones or seats which are called *āsana.* There are no thrones or seats in Sāñcī or Bhārhut. He points out that they were introduced later in the development.[236] Furthermore, he believes that the first Buddha image and the first representations of a throne or seat were contemporary. Only when a throne or a seat has been placed in front of the *bodhivṛkṣa*, we can see it as a representation of the Buddha. As long as there are altars they cannot be regarded as aniconic representations of the Buddha; they are only depictions of worship at a sacred site.[237] It is an important elucidatory example that he points to and it is possible for us to see the difference between the massif stone slabs at Sāñcī and the smaller seats or chairs at Amarāvatī.

The writings of a Japanese scholar, Kanoko Tanaka, are also closely connected with Susan Huntington's interpretation. It is impossible to decide whether she worked out her theory herself or whether the writings of Huntington inspired her. However, there are no references to the works of Huntington included in her writings. Tanaka starts her investigation by pointing out that the absence of the Buddha image in early Buddhist art should not be seen as a negative expression of the presence of the Buddha image as it often has been by scholars in the past. In her opinion the original form of Buddhist faith did not need any images of the Buddha. Therefore, there is no need to look for prohibitions or taboos against image-making among the Buddhists of those days.[238]

For Tanaka, the visible personages on the reliefs are the leading actors. Kings, laymen, laywomen and dancing girls showing devotional attitudes towards the Buddhist faith are for her a kind of performance. The sculptor's intention was to portray the actual scenes at Buddhist sites. She believes that the sites had become a kind of stage where a sort of Buddhist play was shown to the visitors.[239] Tanaka does not totally deny that the life story of the Buddha could be seen in the reliefs, but she believes that the sculptors did not intend to visualize the stories of the Buddha.

1.7 Summary of Previous Research

This survey of previous research has demonstrated conflicting interpretations of early Buddhist art over the years. The modern debate about aniconic art has mostly dealt with separate reliefs and what they represent. Susan L Huntington

[236] van Kooij, "Remarks on Festivals ...", p. 39.
[237] Loc. cit.
[238] K Tanaka, *Absence of the Buddha Image in Early Buddhist Art. Toward its Significance in Comparative Religion* (New Delhi: D K Printworld, 1998), pp. 3–4.
[239] Tanaka, *Absence of the Buddha Image ...*, p. 66.

has proposed that the theory of aniconism is not valid as an all-inclusive explanation. Instead, she claims that the so-called aniconic art represents Buddhist sites of worship. This idea was not totally new as Lüders was partially of the same opinion. Furthermore, her theory is an evaluation of the writings of Albert Foucher. In response to this interpretation, Vidya Dehejia, advocates that aniconic symbols may be interpreted in three distinct and equally valid ways. She also suggests that artists intentionally made reliefs with a double layer of meaning.

A most original and interesting theory about the origin of Buddhist visual art has been postulated by Dietrich Schlingloff. He assumes that devices in meditational practices were the origin of aniconic signs. Another way to interpret the origin of Buddhist aniconic art has been to assume that it was prohibited to make images of the Buddha in early Buddhism. Closely connected with this is the idea that the Buddha could not be physically depicted because of his Buddha-nature. It is Dietrich Seckel who has most clearly maintained this theory. In spite of this theory, Seckel has clearly pointed out the common Indian origin of early Buddhist art. The Vedic origin of Buddhist art has been pointed out by E Benda. Its Indian origin has in later years also been emphasized by Y Krishan. Albert Foucher also considered the Indian origin of Buddhist art. He believed that pilgrimages to sacred Buddhist sites were the origin of Buddhist aniconic art. He believed that when Buddhist pilgrims visited the four great holy places, they brought small souvenirs connected with the sites back home, or brought them as votive offerings when visiting the sites. It was these souvenirs and what they represented that started the tradition of Buddhist aniconic signs, according to him.

CHAPTER 2

Prohibition and Resistance against Images of the Buddha

2.1 Introduction

It has been assumed that the absence of anthropomorphic images of the Buddha in early Buddhism derived from a prohibition or that it was unsuitable for the early Buddhists to depict the Buddha because "...he cannot be said to exist in this world".[1] It is, of course, difficult to accept such assumptions without further investigation. The reason behind these assumptions may actually be found among the cultural traditions of Western scholars. Iconoclasm in the Near East and Europe may have been in the mind of those scholars who proposed such a reason for the absence of anthropomorphic images of the Buddha. Likewise, scholars may have compared early Buddhist art with the oldest Christian paintings of the catacombs which already from the beginning had a definite religious purpose. This chapter will therefore concentrate on the question why the Buddha was not depicted anthropomorphically in early Buddhist art.

2.2 Prohibitions against Images of the Buddha

Any acceptable evidence for a prohibition on making images of the Buddha in early Buddhism has not yet been presented. The main evidence so far is an indirect reference to a proscription found in the monastic rules (*vinaya*) of the *Sarvāstivādins*. A C Soper gives a translation to this text in which it is postulated that Anāthapiṇḍika asks permission from the Buddha to make images of bodhisattvas "... since it is not permitted to make a likeness of the Buddha's body".[2] As far I can see it was Arthur Waley who pointed to this text for the first time. However, he did not take it as an evidence for a prohibition. Instead, he took the passage as an indication that others not the *Sarvāstivādins* made images of the Buddha.[3] Schlingloff does not believe in a prohibition against

[1] J S Strong, "Buddha Bhakti and the Absence of the Blessed One", *Premier Colloque Étienne Lamotte (Bruxelles et Liège 24–27 septembre 1989).* (Louvain-La-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, 1993), p. 131.
[2] A C Soper, "Early Buddhist Attitudes Toward the Art of Painting" *The Art Bulletin* 32 (1950), p. 148.
[3] A Waley, "Did Buddha Die of Eating Pork? With a Note on Buddha's Image", *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 1 (1932), pp. 352–354.

images of the Buddha. He points out that no motivation for a prohibition is presented in the text. Instead, the prohibition were probably placed in the mouth of the Buddha by the authors of the monastic rules.[4] It is notable that the Buddha actually gave permission to the inquirer. It is therefore more likely that this *vinaya* text was made to sanction an already established tradition of making images of the Buddha.

There is also a passage in a Chinese version of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, a passage that does not exist in the Pāli version. It is not a real prohibition, but a statement of why it is impossible to make an image of the Buddha. According to the Chinese text in a translation by Kanoko Tanaka, the reason why it is impossible to make images of Tathāgata is that "the body of Tathāgata is pure and breathing celestial aurae ...".[5] It is quite possible to imagine that the Buddha image had already been made when this passage was written.

No text has been found that clearly prohibits making images of the Buddha. Even if such a text were to be found it might instead be evidence that images actually were made at the time the text was written. Therefore, I am bound to agree with John C Huntington who has questioned whether there really was a prohibition against making images of the Buddha. Instead, he believes that the *Sarvāstivādins* prohibition must be seen as an aside from the main stream of Buddhist concern about images of the Buddha.[6]

2.3 The True Nature of the Buddha

The Buddha is absent after his *parinirvāṇa* and does not exist in the world any longer. This absence of the Buddha has been discussed by several scholars. John S Strong illustrates it by three specific examples from the Buddhist literature, the story about Upagupta, the Cave of the Buddha's shadow and the story of Phussadeva.[7] There is, however, a problem in using the absence of the Buddha as an explanation of Buddhist aniconic art. How far back is it possible to support belief in an absent Buddha? Doctrines and stories about the absence of the Buddha are not found as early as Buddhist aniconic art. It is therefore possible to assume that philosophical explanations and stories about the absent Buddha are later interpretations of already existing Buddhist aniconic art.

The absence of the Buddha is closely connected with doctrines about the nature of the Buddha, with buddhologies. Doctrines about his *nirvāṇa/buddha* nature have been referred to as explanations of aniconism. Seckel believes that it is not Śākyamuni himself who is worshipped in the *stūpa*. Instead, it is the idea of the dharma, the *dharmakāya*. This *dharma* body could not be made in

[4] Schlingloff, "Die Bedeutung ...", pp. 311–312.
[5] Tanaka, *Absence of the Buddha Image* ..., pp. 56–57.
[6] J C Huntington, "The Origin of the Buddha Image. Early Image Traditions and the Concept of Buddhadarśanapunyā", *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia*. Edited by A K Narain (New Delhi: Kanak Publications, 1985), p. 29.
[7] Strong, "Buddha Bhakti ...", pp. 131–140.

physical form. Therefore, the explanation of aniconic art, according to Seckel, is "... his true nirvana essence, inconceivable in visual form and human shape".[8] Peter Harvey expresses a similar view. He believes that "... the profound nature of a Buddha could not be adequately conveyed by a mere human form".[9]

The argument for a doctrinal reason why the Buddha was not depicted in early Buddhist art derives from two different assumptions. First, it assumes a radical doctrine in early Buddhism that made it unsuitable to depict the body of the Buddha. Second, it is also founded on the assumption that artistic and cultic expressions depended upon philosophical doctrines and that monks and nuns really took notice of visual art and the way it was made.

Let us start by looking at the radical doctrine about the nature of the Buddha. It has been assumed that the *dharmakāya* was regarded as the essence of the Buddha. The foremost text used to illustrate this is taken from the *Suttanipāta*. In this early Buddhist text the Buddha is answering questions from Upasīva.

> "'Just as a flame tossed about by the force of the wind, Upasīva', said the Blessed One, 'goes out and no longer counts (as a flame), so a sage released from his mental body goes out and no longer counts (as a sage)'.
>
> 'He (who) has gone out, does he not exist, or (does he remain) unimpaired for ever? Explain this to me well, sage, for thus is this doctrine known to you'.
>
> 'There is no measuring of one who has gone out, Upasīva', said the Blessed One. 'That no longer exists for him by which they might speak of him. When all phenomena have been removed, then all ways of speaking are also removed'". (SN: 1074–1076)[10]

This text and the later *Milindapañhā* (III 5:10) have been pointed out as indicating that it was inappropriate to depict the body of the Buddha. This interpretation of the texts is highly doubtful. Philosophical speculations about several bodies of the Buddha were a later development. It is true that the last two vaggas of the *Suttanipāta* (*Aṭṭhakavagga* and *Pārāyanavagga*) are among the oldest Buddhist texts that are left to us. K R Norman is of the opinion that *Aṭṭhakavagga* and *Pārāyanavagga* were composed not later than the beginning of the third century BC. The great age of these two vaggas is supported by the fact that a commentary upon them, the *Niddesa*, was composed at an early date.[11] The verses that concern us here were probably not included in *Pārāyanavagga* at that early time because they were not commented upon by the *Niddesa*. This means that either these verses did not exist when the *Niddesa*

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[8] *The Image of the Buddha* ..., p. 24.
[9] Harvey, "Venerated Objects ...", p. 68.
[10] [*Suttanipāta*]. *The Group of Discourses (Sutta Nipāta)*, Vol. 2. Revised translation by K R Norman, Pali Text Society Translation Series No. 45 (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1992), pp. 120–121.
[11] K R Norman, *Pāli Literature. Including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of all the Hīnayāna schools of Buddhism*, A History of Indian Literature, Vol. 7, Fasc. 2, Edited by J Gonda (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), pp. 63–64, 69, 85–86.

was composed or, if they did exist, they were not yet regarded as canonical.[12] Therefore, the text cited above may not be older than the 2nd century BC.

It has been argued that it would be unsuitable to depict the Buddha because when the Buddha entered *nirvāṇa* he could not be seen any longer. The *nirvāṇa/buddha* nature of the Buddha was, according to both Seckel and Harvey, the reason behind the absence of the Buddha in early Buddhism. This *nirvāṇa/buddha* nature was the essence of the Buddha even in his life among the people. "... even as *bodhisatta* he was 'transcendental'".[13] However, even before he had achieved enlightenment and was still a *bodhisattva* he was not depicted in physical shape. Seckel believes that Śākyamuni was recognized by his followers as a *buddha* even before his enlightenment. He possessed therefore no physical form in which he might be suitably portrayed.[14] In his argumentation, Seckel seems to neglect the fact that the Bodhisattva was portrayed as King Vessantara, as the monkey Rājovāda and as the deer Kuruṅgamiga on the railing gateways in Sāñcī *stūpa* 1. Just as he was regarded as a Buddhisattva in the early years of his last life, he was also regarded as a Buddhisattva in his previous lives. Therefore, such radical doctrine seems unlikely.

The second necessary assumption for the plausibility of this theory is that artistic and cultic expressions are dependent upon philosophical doctrines. Such a connection is of course questionable. Connections between philosophical doctrines and cultic and artistic expressions are a complicated matter and can not be taken for granted. It implies that learned monks and nuns really did care about artistic expression and that they could decide its shape. Therefore, even if there were such a radical doctrine in early Buddhism that recognized the *nirvāṇa/buddha* nature as the true and only essence of the Buddha, this does not prove that it was the reason that the Buddhists avoided depicting the Buddha.

Neither monks or nuns are seen in the aniconic reliefs. This fact has been presented as an argument supporting some kind of prohibition against depicting both the Buddha, monks and nuns. The reason why no monks and nuns were depicted in early Buddhist art will have its natural explanation when we take into consideration the historic development of Buddhist aniconic art.

2.4 Programmatic Aniconism

Another way of looking at the plausibility of a prohibition against images of the Buddha or a doctrine that makes it inappropriate to make images of the Buddha is to compare these theories with the programmatic aniconism promulgated in Deuteronomistic theology. It was impossible in Deuteronomistic

[12] [*Suttanipāta*]. *The Group of Discourses* ..., p. xxxi–xxxii. Norman, *Pāli literature* ..., p. 69.
[13] Harvey, "Venerated Objects ...", p. 68.
[14] *The Image of the Buddha* ..., p. 22.

theology to depict the god as "there was only a voice".[15] The Buddha, on the other hand, had a form and a body irrespective of whether he was regarded as an ordinary human being or as a *mahāpuruṣa*. The cultures surrounding the Israelites in the ancient Near East, especially those of Babylonia and Egypt, were marked by iconic worship. This situation must have contributed to a sharpening of their awareness of the distinctive nature of their own cult. Tryggve Mettinger believes that this was an important factor in the prohibition against making images in ancient Israel.[16]

No similar circumstances were present for the early Buddhists. The culture in ancient India was not marked by iconic worship. The basis for the Vedic tradition was ritual sacrifice performed by a priest (*brāhmaṇa* or *ṛtvij*). Visual anthropomorphic representations of gods did not constitute an important part of the cultic practice in India at the time of the Buddha. Some images were certainly present, but the cult was mostly not directed towards any images. Therefore, the occurrences of a prohibition or a doctrine that makes it unsuitable to make images of the Buddha become implausible in comparison with Deuteronomistic theology. It is difficult to assume the existence of programmatic aniconism in Buddhism. The main question we have to ask is not why images of the Buddha are missing in early Buddhism, but why the Buddhists began to make aniconic representations of the Buddha. Why did they start depicting the Buddha at all?

2.5 Conclusion

Those who believe that Buddhist aniconic art can be explained as an expression of a religious or philosophical doctrine, or that its origin is derived from a prohibition on depicting the Buddha anthropomorphically, seem to neglect the fact that a development of aniconic signs is easily noticeable. They also take for granted that artistic and cultic expressions depend upon philosophical doctrines.

No acceptable evidence for a prohibition on making images of the Buddha in early Buddhism has been presented. Neither has there been any evidence for a doctrine that it is inappropriate to depict the body of the Buddha. Even if there was a doctrine in early Buddhism that pointed to the *nirvāṇa* nature of the Buddha, the connection between this doctrine and Buddhist aniconic art is not obvious.

Compared with the cultures surrounding the Israelites in the ancient Near East the culture in ancient India was not marked by iconic worship. Visual representations did not constitute an important part of the cultic practice in India at the time of the Buddha. Therefore, in Buddhist art there is a *de facto*

[15] Deut 4:12
[16] Mettinger, *No Graven Image?* ..., pp. 24–25.

aniconism that has not much in common with any programmatic theological aniconism.

It is, therefore, not my opinion that a prohibition or some kind of religious or philosophical doctrine prevented the Buddhists from making images of the Buddha. Instead, it is my firm conviction that Foucher pointed to an important fact when he said that: “If they did not do it [make images of the Buddha], it was because it was not the custom to do it”.[17] Instead of searching for a prohibition or a doctrine that may explain the absence of images of the Buddha, I will instead concentrate on the origin and arise of Buddhist aniconic art.

[17] Foucher, *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art* ..., p. 7.

CHAPTER 3

Meditation as the Origin of Buddhist Art

3.1 Introduction

We have already seen that Dieter Schlingloff is the modern scholar who most consistently gave prominence to the opinion that meditation may be a principal influence upon early Buddhist art. The main aim of this chapter is to examine this interpretation and see if it can help us understand Buddhist aniconic art. This can only be done if we turn our attention to the way meditation is practised.

First, however, this chapter will start by explicating the Buddhist practice of meditating upon the Buddha (*buddhānusmṛti*) in the early history of Buddhism. One eyewitness of the practice of *buddhānusmṛti* is the Chinese pilgrim Yi-Jing[1] who travelled through 7th century India and described how monks recited the virtues of the Buddha. *Buddhānusmṛti* is, however, much older than that. The importance of *buddhānusmṛti* in early Buddhism will be illustrated from three distinct categories of Buddhist literature. First, the canonical writings, chiefly from the Pāli canon, secondly some commentaries and compendia of Buddhist doctrines and finally some *Mahāyāna* texts from several different traditions.

3.2 *Buddhānusmṛti* in the Early History of Buddhism

3.2.1 A Definition of *Buddhānusmṛti*

The foremost commentary on meditation in the Lankan Theravāda tradition is the *Visuddhimagga* compiled by Buddhaghosa in the early 5th century AD. It is divided into three parts, virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and understanding (*paññā*). Buddhaghosa discusses forty different kinds of meditation practices in the *samādhi* part. *Buddhānusmṛti* is one of these. *Samādhi* is a noun derived from the verb root *dhā-*, which means "to put", "to place" or "to hold" and the prefixes *sam* and *ā* which mean "together" and "unto". Literally

[1] Yi-Jing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671–695).* Translated by J Takakusu. 2nd Indian Edition (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982 (1896)), pp. 152–155.

the stem *samādhā* means "putting together" or "to compose". Buddhaghosa describes *samādhi* as *kusalacittekaggatā,* which can be translated as "one-pointedness of the blessed mind" or "unification of the blessed mind". "Concentration" may be the best word for *samādhi* because it describes practices which direct attention of the mind upon one single object and exclude unwanted stimuli.

Buddhaghosa describes *buddhānusmṛti* (Sanskrit, Pāli *buddhānussati*) as "... a term for mindfulness with the Enlightened Ones special qualities as its object".[2] The term is a compound of *buddha*, and *anusmṛti. Anusmṛti* came from the verb root *smṛi-* (Pāli *sati-*) and means "to remember", "recollect", "bear in mind", "call to mind", "think of" or "be mindful".[3] Already in the *Nikāyas* (MN I:301) we can see that *smṛti*, hereafter translated as "mindfulness", is a kind of concentration (*samādhi*). The lay follower Visākhā asks the nun Dhammadinnā what *samādhi* is. She answers that *samādhi* is "one-pointedness of mind" (*cittassa ekaggatā*). He continues and asks what is included in *samādhi.* She answers that the four applications of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) are included. There seem to be two different ways to practise "mindfulness" (*smṛti*). One that places all attention on a single point, a *mantra*, the breath or a visual object and tries to hold it in the mind for a long period. The other is to expand the awareness to all the mental events, like sensations, thoughts, emotions and memory. Any new event that arises may be taken as the meditative object. Thus, mindfulness with the Buddha and his qualities as its object is a kind of devotional practice wherein the object of worship is an object of concentration.

3.2.2 The Precursor of *Buddhānusmṛti*

We find a precursor of *buddhānusmṛti* in a contemplative form of worship called *upāsana. Upāsana* meditation is found in the *Upaniṣads* and *Āraṇyakas.* Contemplative worship in the form of pronouncing the name and epithets of a god may, according to Gonda, be found already in the Veda.[4] The objects used in *upāsana* to develop concentration are Vedic deities such as Sūrya, Agni, Indra etc. Also perceptible symbols such as wind, space, water and fire, and imperceptible objects such as the breath, the sense organs and uttering of verbal symbols are used as objects. The objects are used as the means for the contemplator to realize *brahman.*[5] Edward Crangle discusses the development of *upāsana* based on the unpublished PhD thesis of Neela Velkar.[6] The con-

[2] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, Translated by Bhikkhu Ñyāṇamoli, 5th Edition (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991 (1956)), p. 191.
[3] M Monier-Williams, *Sanskṛit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Munishiram Manoharlal, 1981 (1899)), pp. 1271–1272.
[4] J Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism. A Comparison* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), p. 15.
[5] E F Crangle, *The Origin and Development of Early Indian Contemplative Practices.* Studies in Oriental Religions 29 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994), pp. 72–82.
[6] N A Velkar, *Upāsanā in the Upaniṣads*, Unpublished PhD Thesis (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1969).

templative *upāsana* worship has its origin, according to Velkar, in the Vedic sacrifice, where the worshipper invoked and sought communion with the deity by means of external offerings. This ceremonial worship of the pre-*Upaniṣadic* period shifted to meditative worship in the principal *Upaniṣads*. In the later *Upaniṣads* there was a synthesis of *upāsana* and *yoga* techniques.[7]

3.2.3 *Buddhānusmṛti* in the Canonical Literature of the *Hīnayāna* Schools

3.2.3.1 Buddhānusmṛti in the Earliest Part of the Canon

There are several references to *buddhānusmṛti* practice in the Pāli canon. Part of the *Suttanipāta* and the *Dhammapada* are regarded as belonging to the earliest Buddhist literature. In both there are a few short verses that mention seeing the Buddha. However, we must bear in mind that there exist both early and later parts in these texts, as in many other Buddhist texts. In the *Pārāyana-vagga,* the last *vagga* of the *Suttanipāta*, we find an early reference to mentally seeing the Buddha, without referring to the word *buddhānusmṛti.* Here, the old venerable monk Piṅgiya is describing to the Brahmin Bāvarin how it is possible for him to constantly be in the presence of the Buddha.

> "I see him with my mind as if with my eye (*manasā cakkhunā*), being vigilant day and night, brahman. I pass the night revering (*namassamāno*) him. For that very reason I think there is no staying away from him". (SN:1142)[8]

Piṅgiya was very old and weak and it was impossible for him to personally follow the Buddha. "Mental seeing" is described as a way to see and to follow the Buddha when there is no possibility of following him personally. This is what later generations have always had to do, as the Buddha is not present in ordinary life any longer. To see the Buddha is also the aim of *buddhānusmṛti* practice even if this word is not mentioned in the *Suttanipāta*, 1142. The phenomen is there. This text is of course no evidence that the practice of *buddha-anusmṛti* was taught by the Buddha. This part of *Suttanipāta* has been dated to the 2nd century BC.[9]

In *Dhammapada* (v. 296–301) there is a list of six recollections. First there is recollection of the Buddha.

> "The followers of Gotama are always well awakened, in whom day and night there is constantly mindfulness on the Buddha".[10]

Thereafter, there are recollections of the *dhamma*, the *saṅgha*, the body, non-harming and of mental exercises. In *Dīgha-nikāya* (III:250, III:280) there are

[7] Crangle, *The Origin and Development ...*, p. 87.
[8] [*Suttanipāta*]. *The Group of Discourses ...*, p. 128.
[9] For the age of these verses in SN see chapter 2.3.
[10] [*Dhammapada*]. *The World of the Doctrine (Dhammapada).* Translated by K R Norman. Pali Text Society Translation Series No. 46 (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1997), p. 43.

two suttas, *Saṅgītisutta* and *Dasutarasutta*, which also include a six-fold list of recollections. It is, however, not the same six recollections. After recollections of *Buddha*, *dhamma* and *saṅgha* these lists advocate recollections of moral precepts (*sīla*), renunciation (*cāga*) and devas (*devatā*).[11]

In *Aṅguttara-nikāya* we have several pieces of information about the practice of recollecting the Buddha. In AN I:30 and I:42 there is a tenfold scheme of recollections, which starts with *buddhānusmṛti*.

> "Monks, there is one thing which, if practised and made much of, conduces to downright revulsion and disgust, to ending, tranquillity, full comprehension, to perfect enlightenment, to nibbāna. What is that one thing? It is calling to mind (*anusatti*) the Buddha".[12]

The same thing is repeated for *dhamma*, *saṅgha*, virtue (*sīla*), renunciation (*cāga*), the devas, in-breathing and out-breathing (*ānāpāna*), death (*maraṇa*), the body constituents (*kāyagata*) and tranquillity (*upasama*). In AN I:42 the same tenfold scheme is repeated under the headings of *jhāna*.[13] The *Aṅguttara-nikāya* is divided into sections (*nipāta*) dealing with subjects connected with a number. In this case the recollection of the Buddha occurs in the *Book of the One* (*Ekanipāta*), which consists mainly of *mātikā*-lists, summary lists of contents, which do not give us much help to know how this recollection was practised. In the *Book of the Elevens* (*Ekādasakanipāta*) (AN V:329–332) there is a six fold list of the recollection. After the recollection of the *Buddha*, *dhamma* and *saṅgha,* there is recollection of virtue (*sīla*), renunciation (*cāga*) and devas.[14]

The oldest Buddhist literature was composed and transmitted orally by reciters (*bhāṇakas*) and had mnemonic functions. A large part of the oldest literature consists of collections and lists. *Buddhānusmṛti* is arranged in series together with other recollections nearly everywhere in the canon. Most of them are in a series of three, six or ten recollections. On a few occasions they are also arranged as four and five recollections. The first three are always *buddha*, *dhamma* and *saṅgha*, but the others are different. This indicates that recollection of the *buddha*, *dhamma* and *saṅgha* must have come into existence at an earlier date than the others. We see *buddha*, *dhamma* and *saṅgha* together in various contexts in the canon. They are often described as the three Jewels (*triratna*) and they are also present in the common recitation formula (*tisaraṇa*) *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. When the canon was written down for the first time, different lists of recollections already existed and could have existed orally for a long time. The practice of the first three recollections must therefore date from an early time.

[11] [Dīgha-Nikāya]. *Dialogues* ..., Pt. 3, pp. 234, 257.

[12] [*Aṅguttara-Nikāya*]. *The Book of Gradual Sayings (Anguttara-Nikāya) or More-Numbered Suttas*, Vol. 1, Translated by F L Woodward (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1989 (1932)), p. 27.

[13] [*Aṅguttara-Nikāya*]. *The Book of Gradual* ..., Vol. 1, p. 38.

[14] [*Aṅguttara-Nikāya*]. *The Book of Gradual* ..., Vol. 5, pp. 209–215.

3.2.3.2 The Ten Epithets of the Buddha

In the *Pāṭikasutta* (DN III:5), *Vatthūpamasutta* (MN I:37) and *Sakkasutta* (SN I:118–119) among others, there are descriptions of the *Buddha*, *dhamma* and *saṅgha*, which have been the standard descriptions of these first three recollections. The Buddha is here described with titles or attributes, which are commonly known as the *ten epithets* (*adhivacana*) of the Buddha. Maurice Walshe has translated the ten epithets like this:

> "This Blessed Lord [*bhagavā*] is an Arahant [*arahaṃ*], a full-enlightened Buddha [*sammāsambuddho*], endowed with wisdom and conduct [*vijjācaraṇasampanno*], the Well-farer [*sugato*], Knower of the worlds [*lokavidū*], incomparable Trainer of men to be tamed [*purisaddammasārathi*], Teacher of gods and humans [*devamanussānaṃ*], the Buddha [*buddho*], the Blessed Lord [*bhagavā*]". (DN III:5)[15]

We find this formula in other places in the canon as well, for example in *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (III:285 and V:329). Reciting names and epithets is not a unique Buddhist practice. Recitation and devotion in front of gods are a common religious practices in India. It is associated foremost with *bhakti*, but is also present in the *Upaniṣads,* the *Āraṇyakas* and even in the *Veda.* Later we will see what Buddhaghosa has to tell us about this ten-fold formula.

To recite a formula like this must have been a way to strengthen the concentration and at the same time feel the presence of the Buddha, and his moral and mental example. It is even possible that it was regarded as a way to make merit or to provide its practitioner with protection against evil. In the *Sakkasutta* (SN I:218–219), the Buddha tells his disciples that *buddhānusmṛti* practice may overcome any fear or panic for a monk who has gone into the forests.[16]

3.2.3.3 The Formation of Buddhānusmṛti

Most scholars agree that a version of the Buddhist canon was written down for the first time in the 1st century BC, in the so-called *Aluvihāra* redaction in Laṇkā. It is not possible to know exactly which texts were included in this collection. However, a collection of this kind must have been formed during a long period of literary activity. There is no agreement that the Pāli canon is earlier then any Sanskrit version. Both Pāli and Sanskrit canons may go back to texts in a Magadhan dialect, existing at the time of king Aśoka.[17] I have here mostly used the Pāli canon but the importance of *buddhānusmṛti* is apparent from the fact that it has been practised in many different Buddhist traditions. We know for instance that it was also popular among Sarvāstivādins. There are a lot of passages about *buddhānusmṛti* in the Chinese translations of the

[15] [*Dīgha-Nikāya*]. *Thus have I Heard. The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Digha Nikāya).* Translated by M Walshe (London: Wisdom Publications, 1987), p. 372. [*Digha-Nikāya*]. *Dialogues ...*, Pt. 3, p. 10.

[16] [*Saṃyutta-Nikāya*]. *The Book of the Kindred Sayings (Samyutta-Nikāya) or Grouped Suttas*, Translated by Rhys Davids (London: Luzac & Company, 1950), p. 282.

[17] J T Ergardt, *Faith and Knowledge in Early Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), p. 147 and Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism ...* , p. 787.

Sanskrit *āgamas* that have no counterpart in the Pāli canon.[18] These *āgamas* were of Sarvāstivāda origin. Sarvāstivādins had one of its main centres in north-west India and this may have been the place where *buddhānusmṛti* developed and received early popularity. We can also with good reason presume that this tradition was popular in this area because it developed in close connection with or in opposition to the *bhakti* movement in Kashmir.

Gregory Schopen has questioned the validity of the early dating of the Buddhist canon. He is of the opinion that it is not until the time of the commentaries in the 5th and 6th centuries AD that we can say anything definite about the actual contents of the Pāli canon, as we have no exact information about what the *Aluvihāra* canon contained.[19] He also points out that Aśoka's *Bhābrā* edict does not tell us that there was an existing canon at the time of Aśoka as is commonly believed. Regarding *buddhānusmṛti*, there is no need to be sceptical about its existence in the 1st century BC. Even if we deny the existence of a fixed canon at the time of Aśoka, we can see that the *Bhābrā* edict proves an early existence of Buddhist texts. It is however too much to say that *buddha-anusmṛti* has been proved to have existed at the time of Aśoka. On the other hand, we have seen that in the *Upaniṣads* there existed a similar kind of devotional contemplation (*upāsana*) as *buddhānusmṛti*. This had its roots in Vedic sacrifice and it is not too bold to suggest that *upāsana* contemplation was a precursor to early Buddhist cultic practice and to *buddhānusmṛti*.

The way *buddhānusmṛti* was practised in early Buddhism is a difficult question to solve from the canonical writings. We can gain some more ideas if we leave the Pāli canon and turn our attention to other Buddhist traditions, but first we shall see what later Theravāda texts can tell us about *buddhānusmṛti*.

3.2.4 *Buddhānusmṛti* in the Post-Canonical Literature of the *Hīnayāna* Schools

3.2.4.1 Visuddhimagga

Visuddhimagga was written in the early 5th century in the tradition of the Mahāvihāra school. It is a systematic compendium of Buddhist doctrine, but it is also a handbook for meditators. It is divided in three parts regarding virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and understanding (*pañña*). Buddhaghosa described forty different kinds of meditation practice in the part dealing with *samādhi*. A meditator "... should apprehend from among the forty meditation subjects one that suits his own temperament".[20] The forty meditation practices

[18] P M Harrison, "Buddhānusmṛti in the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6 (1978), pp. 36–37.

[19] G Schopen, "Two problems in the History of Indian Buddhism. The Layman/Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit", *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks. Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Text of Monastic Buddhism in India*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), pp. 23–24.

[20] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* ..., p. 90.

are the ten *kasiṇas*, ten kinds of foulness, ten recollections, four divine abidings, four immaterial states, one perception and one defining. *Buddhānusmṛti* is one of the ten recollections (*anussati*).

The essence of *buddhānusmṛti* for Buddhaghosa is the ten epithets (*adhivacana*) of the Buddha. We have already seen the formula in different Pāli *nikāyas*. It is a listing of titles and attributes much like a confession of faith. The meditator should reflect on each of the terms. Each of these epithets of the Buddha are in addition the object of a rather detailed exposition by Buddhaghosa.[21] To recite the Buddha's epithet and Buddhaghosa's exposition of them is a way to concentrate the mind in the same way as it was proclaimed in the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*. But it has also another goal. This is to practice *buddha-anusmṛti* in such a way as to feel the presence of the Buddha, to be near the Buddha himself.

> "When a bhikkhu is devoted to this recollection of the Buddha ... he cames to feel as if he were living in the Master's presence ... as though he were face to face with the Master".[22]

We have seen the same in *Suttanipāta* (SN:1142) and we can also find it in a more recent meditation handbook from Thailand.

> "The monk who arduously develops recollecting the Buddha will attain an unlimited faith and wisdom as if he were with the Buddha ... through the meditator were standing before the Buddha himself".[23]

3.2.4.2 Buddhānusmṛti in the Theravāda Tradition

In the Theravāda tradition there is a meditation handbook called *Yogāvacara* (*Manual of a Mystic*), which among other meditation practices deals with *buddhānusmṛti*. *Yogāvacara* is a short text in Pāli and Sinhalese, compiled during the eighteenth century. It is most likely that it was derived from a Pāli or Thai source brought to Laṇkā at that time. On a request from the Sinhalese, a deputation of Thai Buddhist monks went to Laṇkā and gave rise to the Siyama Nikāya. They also brought with them many Buddhist manuscripts and it is not unlikely that the *Yogāvacara* manuscript came to Laṇkā at that time. There is an old, but still living, meditation tradition in Thailand and Cambodia, probably with roots from the Mon people, which seems to be in the same tradition as the *Yogāvacara* manual. A meditation handbook written in northern Thailand in 1900 by Bhikkhu Pannawong (Pāli: Pannavaṃsa), and translated by Donald K Swearer, belongs to that tradition and to a large extent deals with *buddhānusmṛti*.[24] *Saddavimala* described by L Finot[25], *Dhammakāya*

[21] Ibid., pp. 192–196.
[22] Ibid., p. 209.
[23] D K Swearer, "The Way to Meditation", *Buddhism in Practice*, Edited by D S Lopez Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 213.
[24] Swearer, "The Way to Meditation ...", pp. 207–215.
[25] L Finot, "Recherches sur la Litterature Laotienne", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 17. 5 (1917), pp. 77–83.

translated by G Cœdès[26] and a text in Khmer, *Le Chemin de Laṅkā*, translated by F Bizot[27], also belongs to this meditation tradition, but to examine this tradition in Southeast Asia more closely would take us too far from the subject at hand.

3.2.4.3 Buddhānusmṛti among other Hīnayāna Schools

Buddhānusmṛti practice was not only popular among the Theravāda tradition, but also among other Hīnayāna schools and among Mahāyāna. This is a strong indication of the importance of this meditation practice. We know that *buddhānusmṛti* practice must have been popular in north-west India. Firstly, because the development of the early Pure Land movement is closely connected with this area. Furthermore, north-west India was a centre of the Sarvāstivāda school and there are at least two texts dealing with *buddhānusmṛti* preserved from this school. One text is the *Yogācārabhūmi*, probably written by Saṅgharakṣa in the 2nd century AD, and which at least to a small extent discusses *buddhānusmṛti*.[28] A fragment of a Sarvāstivāda meditation handbook, including some passages on *buddhānusmṛti* practice was found at Turfan. This *Sanskrit* text has been edited and translated by Dieter Schlingloff in his *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch* (hereafter: *Yogalehrbuch*).

In *Yogalehrbuch* we can see how symbols are used as a means of meditation. We can, as an example, see that water bubbles are used as symbols of feelings or perceptions[29] and that a monkey or a child is regarded as a symbol of thought or mind.[30] The symbols are often taken from the canonical writings. Water bubbles as a symbol for feelings are for example taken from a story in *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (22:95) where it is said that the Buddha told his followers that the essence of a feeling is empty like the essence of a water bubble.[31]

In the *Yogalehrbuch* there is a fivefold list of recollections. After the *Buddha*, *dharma* and *saṅgha*, the list continues with recollections of *sīla* and *devatā*. This resembles the list in *Sangītisutta* and *Dasutarasutta* (DN III:250 ; III:280), except that *cāgānusmṛti* is missing. *Buddhānusmṛti* starts as usual with the ten epithets (*adhivacana*) of the Buddha. They are the same as in *Pāṭikasutta* (DN III:5) and *Visuddhimagga* but in Sanskrit.[32] After the recollections of the epithets the text continues to concentrate on the life story of the Buddha, which in this text is an important object for meditation.[33] The meditation lapse continues through different symbolic shapes. The practitioner sees a woman carrying a vessel with oil and inside he sees a diamond throne and a

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[26] G Cœdès, "Dhammakāya", *The Adyar Library Bulletin* (Madras) 20. 3/4 (1956), pp. 248–286.
[27] F Bizot, *Le Chemin de Laṅkā* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1992).
[28] P Demiéville, "La Yogācārabhūmi de Saṅgharakṣa", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 44.2 (1954), pp. 341.
[29] *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch* ..., p. 97.
[30] Ibid., p. 86.
[31] [*Saṃyutta-Nikāya*]. *The Book of the Kindred* ..., p. 119.
[32] *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch* ..., p. 174.
[33] Ibid., p. 175.

sun wheel. The recollection continues with emanation of the Buddha in the practitioner's mind[34] and comes to an end when he reaches the desired enlightenment.

3.2.5 *Pratyutpanna-samādhi* in the *Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra*

3.2.5.1 The Origin and Context of PraS

A most interesting *Mahāyāna* text for our purpose is *Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra* (hereafter: *PraS*). It is also known as *Bhadrapāla sūtra*. This Sanskrit text may be as old as the 1st century AD, but definitely dates from no later than 179 AD. In 179 AD it was translated for the first time into Chinese by Lokakṣema (T. 418). Unfortunately, we do not have a Sanskrit version of it, apart from a very small Central Asian fragment. Only Chinese and Tibetan translations are still in existence.[35] *PraS* has been translated three times into Chinese, which clearly indicates its popularity in China.[36] *PraS* is not a technical manual on the practice of meditation, but a *Mahāyāna sūtra* with the lay follower Bhadrapāla as the principal character besides the Buddha. The story takes place at Rājagṛha during the reign of Ajātaśatru in the latter parts of Buddha's life.

3.2.5.2 Meditation Face to Face with the Buddhas of the Present

The meditation technique (*pratyutpanna-samādhi*) in the *PraS* is a form of *buddhānusmṛti*. It may be explained as *Samādhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present* or *Samādhi of the One who Stands Face to Face with the Buddhas of the Present*.[37] The benefits of the *pratyutpanna-samādhi* are available not only to monks but also to lay people. The Buddha tells Bhadrapāla that he has to find a quiet place and choose a particular *buddha*. In *PraS* it is not only Śākyamuni but also all the *buddhas* of the present that are the subjects for recollection. All the *buddhas* of the present allude of course to the different *buddhas* living in their own *buddha*-field (*buddhakṣetra*). First and foremost of all the Buddhas is *Amitābha*. *PraS* is the earliest datable literary reference to *Amitābha* and his *Sukhāvatī*. However, *Amitābha* appears here only as an example. The object of *pratyutpanna-samādhi* may be any *buddha* in any *buddha*-field.[38] The practitioner recollects a *Buddha* so that he

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[34] Ibid., p. 177.

[35] [*Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra*]. *The Samādhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present. An Annotated English Tanslation of the Tibetan Version of the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra with Several Appendices ralating to the History of the Text,* Translation by P Harrison, Studia Philologica Buddhica, Monograph Series 5 (Tokyo: The International Institute for Budhist Studies, 1990), pp. xv–xvii.

[36] Harrison, "Buddhānusmṛti in the Pratyutpanna ...", p. 41.

[37] [*Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra*]. *The Samādhi* ..., pp. 3–5.

[38] Heng-ching Shih, *The Syncretism of Chan and Pure Land Buddhism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 30.

can be in his presence and listen to his teachings, and finally be reborn in the same world as the Buddha. Visualizations of the Buddha are described in chapter three of *PraS* in the same way as things that appear in dreams.[39]

The passages in the text deal with the understanding of emptiness. The text has an expressed soteriologic purpose. It wants to teach a meditation practice and bring the practitioners in the presence of a particular *buddha* for the purpose of listening to his teachings (*dharma*).[40] To hear the *dharma* is not only a matter of receiving knowledge, it is also powerful in itself, and hearing it is a way to receive salvation. The final goal is, however, to be reborn in the world of a particular *buddha*, like *Sukhāvatī* the Western paradise of the Buddha Amitābha.

> "If the calling to mind of the Buddha is practised, cultivated, developed and rehearsed, then one will be reborn in this Buddha-field".[41]

3.2.5.3 Meditation Directed to the Bodily Forms of the Buddha

The practice of *buddhānusmṛti* in *PraS* is directed to the mental qualities of the Buddha in the usual form of the ten epithets (*adhivacana*)[42], but it is also directed to the bodily forms of the Buddha.

> "What then, sons of good family, is the calling to mind of the Buddha (*buddhānusmṛti*)? It is when one concentrates on the Tathāgata in this way: ... the Buddha and Lord, endowed with thirty-two marks of the Great Man and a body with a colour like gold, resembling a bright, shining, and well-set golden image ...".[43]

The bodily forms of the Buddha are here compared to a golden image. Images of the Buddha are in *PraS* connected with the practice of *buddhānusmṛti*. The Buddha teaches Bhadrapāla that one of four things to do to obtain *samādhi* is "... having an image of the Tathāgata made, or even just having a picture painted".[44] This early *Mahāyāna* text was very important for the propagation of *buddhānusmṛti* among *Mahāyāna*. In *PraS* we see, maybe for the first time, that *buddhānusmṛti* can be practised in front of images and on the bodily forms of the Buddha.

The connection between images of the Buddha and *buddhānusmṛti* is also clearly visible in a short meditation manual, *Short Method of Meditation* (Ssu-wei liu-yao fa, T. 617), claimed to have been translated by Kumārajīva.

> "When you see a beautiful image that looks like a real Buddha, carefully note every sign—from the *uṣṇīṣa* and *ūrṇa* to the feet and back from the feet to the *uṣṇīṣa*—and then go to a quiet place, close your eyes, and fix your mind on the image, with no other thoughts ... when you have thus meditated until you can see

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[39] [*Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra*]. *The Samādhi* ..., pp. 32–34.
[40] Ibid., p. 33.
[41] Ibid., p. 36.
[42] Ibid., p. 141.
[43] Ibid., p. 37.
[44] Ibid., p. 46.

> the image whenever you wish, this is to attain to *samādhi* by meditation on an image ... Only after this will you be able to see the living body of the Buddha face-to-face ...”.[45]

When the Chinese pilgrim Yi-Jing travelled through 7th century India he came across the practice of *buddhānusmṛti* in front of images of the Buddha. He made notes on the practice of reciting the virtues of the Buddha, which probably is an allusion to the ten epithets (*adhivacana*). He compared this with the practice in China of repeating only the name of the Buddha and admitted that the Indian practice was more effective. Furthermore, Yi-Jing recognised that some Indian monks practised it jointly and some in isolation. In Takakusu´s translation:

> “They all kneel down, and one of them who sings well begins to chant hymns describing the virtues of the Great Teacher with a melodious, pure, and sonorous voice ... In addition there are some who, sitting alone, facing the shrine (*Gandhakutī*), praise the Buddha in their heart”.[46]

This is among the oldest eyewitness accounts we have of the practice of *buddhānusmṛti*, but we must remember that it is at least five hundred years later then the origin of *PraS*.

3.2.6 *Buddhānusmṛti* in the Wisdom Tradition

We have already seen in *PraS* that *buddhānusmṛti* occurred together with the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Even if *buddhānusmṛti* is mostly connected with the Pure Land tradition among *Mahāyāna*, it also has a place in *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.[47] This is a clear indication of its importance in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, as these two traditions are far from close to each other. Sometimes they have been regarded as the two main streams of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, the first engaged in insight meditation and the other in salvation by faith.

The *Prajñāpāramitā* is among the earliest and most influential of the *Mahāyāna* literary works. In Nāgārjuna’s commentary *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* (hereafter: *Mppś*), on the *Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Lines* (*Pañcavimśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitāsūtra*), *buddhānusmṛti* is mentioned and commented upon several times. The original Sanskrit version of *Mppś* is no longer extant. Only Kumārajīva’s Chinese translation, *Ta chih-tu lun* (T. 1509), from the early years of the 5th century is available.[48] There is serious doubt about the authorship of this work. Indeed, the philosopher-monk Nāgārjuna may not have been the author of this text at all. Kumārajīva may

[45] Beyer, “Notes on the Vision Quest ...”, p. 337.
[46] Yi-Jing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion ...*, pp. 152–155.
[47] *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom. With the Divisions of the Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, Translated by E Conze (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979 (1975)), pp. 551–552.
[48] [*Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra*]. *The Samādhi ...*, p. xxiv.

have confused the author of this text with the more famous Nāgārjuna. Zürcher seem to know with certainty that it was not the famous Nāgārjuna who composed *Mppś*.[49] If it was written by the philosopher-monk Nāgārjuna it may be as old as the 2nd century AD. But whatever its origins, it was no later than early 5th century when Kumārajīva translated it.

Six recollections (*Buddhānusmṛti*, *dharmānusmṛti*, *saṃghānusmṛti, śīla-anusmṛti, tyāgānusmṛti* and *devatānusmṛti*) have a significant place in *Mppś*. *Mppś* refers to or quotes from *PraS* several times and Bhādrapala, the principal character in *PraS*, occurs a number of times. The expression *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* is most commonly used, but also *pratyutpanna-samādhi* occurs. In *Mppś buddhānusmṛti* is divided in four parts.[50] First comes the usual ten epithets (*adhivacana*), thereafter meditation on the miracles at the birth of the Buddha. The physic marks of the Buddha and his superhuman powers make up the third part. A practitioner has to meditate upon the 32 major (*lakṣaṇa*) and 80 minor signs (*anuvyañjana*), upon his golden body (*suvarṇavarna kāya*), upon the rays (*raśmi*) which stream out of his body and fill the ten quarters "sur la clarté et la pureté de son éclat comparable à l'or en fusion de la rivière Jambu (*jāmbūnadasuvarṇa*)".[51] The meditator nullifies all other objects in his mind during the meditation, except the signs and colours of the Buddha. He sees the Buddha as a golden vision with a pure emerald (*vaiḍūrya*) at the centre.[52] An emerald (beryl) or some other gem as the symbol of the Buddha is not unique for *Mppś* but a common symbol and we have already seen it in both *Yogalehrbuch* and *PraS*. The fourth and last part of *buddhānusmṛti* in *Mppś* is to meditate upon the five pure aggregates or attributes (*anāsrava-skandha*). These five aggregates are *sīla*, *samādhi*, *prajña*, *vimukti* (deliverance) and *vimukti-jñāna-darśana* (knowledge and vision over deliverance).

Even if quite a lot is written about *buddhānusmṛti* in the *Mppś,* its author takes side against it preferring wisdom (*prajñā*) and a more analytical method. The *Mppś* resembles the *pratyutpanna-samādhi* with a father and *prajñāpāramitā* with a mother. It is the mother that is the most important part. "La tâche (*yatna*, *śrama*) de la mère est la plus lourde. C'est pourqui le Buddha considère la *Prajñā* comme sa mère, et le *Pratyutpannasamādhi* comme som père".[53]

3.2.7 *Buddhānusmṛti* in the Pure Land Tradition

The most powerful extension of *buddhānusmṛti* practice is the Pure Land traditions of *Nianfo* in China and *Nembutsu* in Japan. Pure Land Buddhism re-

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[49] E Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China. The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, Sinica Leidensia 11 (Leiden: E J Brill, 1959), p. 212.
[50] [*Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*]. *Le Traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*, Translated by É Lamotte (Louvain-La-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, 1970), T. 3, pp. 1340–1361.
[51] [*Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*]. *Le Traité ...*, T. 4, p. 1929.
[52] Loc. cit.
[53] Ibid., T. 5, pp. 2367–2369.

fers foremost to a specific cult and meditation practice that leads to visions of Amitābha in the present life or through rebirth in *Sukhāvatī,* the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha. Pure Land Buddhism should not be seen as a distinct Buddhist school, at least not in its early phase. It was more like a movement which inspired several Buddhist traditions. The three main scriptures in the Pure Land tradition are the Shorter *Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtra* and the Longer *Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtra* both written in north-west India in the first century AD. The third scripture is the *Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra*[54] probably written in Central Asia at the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century AD.[55]

The Shorter and Longer *Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtra* speak of holding in mind the name of Amitābha with the aim of being reborn in *Sukhāvatī.* Thereupon, Amitābha will appear at the time of death and the practitioner will attain to *Sukhāvatī.* Those texts describe with great imagination the splendour of *Sukhāvatī* and Amitābha's embodiment of compassion. *Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra* concentrates less on describing the Pure Land of *Sukhāvatī.* It is instead close related to *PraS* and its main goal is to propagate *buddhānusmṛti* practice and thereby see Amitābha in this present life.

> "Those who practice the samādhi ... in accordance with this Sūtra will be able to see, in the present life, Buddha Amitāyus and the two great Bodhisattvas".[56]

Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra seems to consist of different layers, but as Julian Pas suggests, the earliest part is nothing more then a manual of visualization of Amitābha in this life.[57] In *Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra* there is a clear connection between *buddhānusmṛti* and the use of images.[58] Not only are images of Amitābha described in the *Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra*, but also images of the two Bodhisattvas, Avalokitesvara and Mahāsthāma.

> "Let those who meditate on Buddha Amitāyus begin with one single sign or mark—let them first meditate on the white twist of hair between the eyebrows as clearly as possible ; when they have done this, the eighty-four thousand signs and marks will naturally appear before their eyes".[59]

We can assume that *Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra* describes practices of the early 4th century in India, China or Central Asia.[60]

Daoan (312–395? AD) and Hui-yüan (334–416 AD) were among the earliest Chinese monks who emphasized the importance of meditation practice in

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[54] This text is also known as the Meditation Sūtra or Visualization Sūtra.

[55] J F Pas, "Shan-Tao's Interpretation of the Meditative Vision of Buddha Amitāyus" *History of Religions* 14 (1974), pp. 97–98.

[56] J F Pas, *Visions of Sukhāvatī. Shan-tao's commentary on the Kuan Wu-Liang-Shou-Fo Ching* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 51.

[57] Pas, "Shan-Tao's Interpretation ..." p. 98.

[58] Kloppenborg, Poelmeyer, "Visualizations ...", pp. 83–84.

[59] [*Amitāyur-Dhyāna Sūtra = Kuan Ching*]. *Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts*, Edited by E B Cowell, The Sacred Books of the East 49, Edited by M Müller (New York: Dover, 1969 (1894)), p. 181.

[60] K Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine. Ching-ying Hui-yüan's Commentary on the Visualization Sutra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 9–10.

China. It is most likely that Hui-yüan learned about *buddhānusmṛti* from the famous Kasmir meditation master Buddhabhadra, who belonged to the Sarvāstivāda school.[61] Buddhabhadra is said to have come to Lu-Shan in 411 AD. Hui-yüan must therefore have obtained considerable inspiration from his master Daoan. It is told that Daoan with seven of his pupils assembled before an image of Maitreya and made a collective vow to be reborn in the *Tuṣita* heaven.[62] About thirty years later, Hui-yüan assembled one hundred and twenty-three monks and laymen in front of an image of Amitābha, in the same way as his master Daoan had done earlier. This is believed to have occurred in 402 AD at the mountain Lu (Lu-Shan). This assembly is commonly known as the White Lotus Society, but this is probably a later addition. The assembly offered flowers and incense before an image of the Buddha. They also made a collective vow to be reborn in *Sukhāvati*. Hui-Yüan seems to have based his meditation on *PraS* and its purpose was to attain visions of the Buddha in this life.[63] As well as being known as the first Pure Land patriarch, Hui-Yüan was also involved in *prajñāpāramitā* studies and wrote a preface to Kumārajīva's translation of *Mppś*.[64]

Zhiyi (538–597 AD) was a famous monk and organiser of the Tendai school. He was also renowned as a great meditation master and wrote a short work which may be entitled *Establishing the Regulations*, and consists of basic routines and rules of monastic life during his lifetime. If we can trust Zhiyi, this work is a first-hand account of the collective life of worship and meditation at his monastery.[65] It states that monks left the community for a given period of isolation and practised a kind of meditation called the *Four Kinds of Samādhi*, which were four, or rather six, ways of cultivating *samādhi*. Several of these ways resemble *buddhānusmṛti* practice.[66] One of these, *Cultivating Samādhi through Constant Walking*, is a kind of *pratyutpanna samādhi*, in which the meditator over a period of ninety days cultivates *samādhi* while slowly circumambulating an altar dedicated to the Buddha Amitābha. Zhiyi derived this meditation practice from two main sources, *PraS* and *Daśabhūmika[sūtra]vibhāśa*. Zhiyi distinguished three levels in his practice of *pratyutpanna samādhi*. The first level was a visualization of the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of the Buddha Amitābha. The visualization practice was performed from the wheels on the soles of his feet to the *uṣṇīṣa* on the crown of his head and then back again. This was followed by circumambulating and a recitation of the Buddha's name. The second level was recollection

[61] Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest ...*, p. 223.
[62] Ibid., p. 194.
[63] Heng-ching Shih, *The Syncretism of Ch'an ...*, p. 39.
[64] K Ch'en, *Buddhism in China. A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 110.
[65] D B Stevenson, "The Four Kinds of Samādhi in Early T'ien-t'ai Buddhism", *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, Edited by P N Gregory, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 4, The Kuroda Institute for the Study of Buddhism and Human Values, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986), pp. 45–46.
[66] Stevenson, "The Four Kinds of Samādhi ...", pp. 48–54.

of the spiritual qualities of the Buddha and the third about the true nature of the Buddha and all phenomena (*sarvadharmabhūtatā*).[67] We have here a testimony from 6th century China about the practice of a developed *buddha-anusmṛti*, which brings together devotional elements with abstract speculations about the body of the Buddha and the emptiness of all things.

According to tradition, both Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu turned to the Pure Land teaching in old age. Vasubandhu belonged initially to the Sarvāstivāda and Saurtrāntika schools and wrote the *Abhidharmakośa-śāstra*. He was later converted to *Yogācara* by his brother Asaṅga, at least if we follow the traditions. *Sukhāvatīvyūhopadeśa* is another composition that traditionally is attributed to Vasubandhu. This text emphasizes five items of mindfulness leading to birth in Pure Land and to seeing the Buddha. These five are to worship the Buddha Amitāyus, to invoke his name, to vow to be born in the Pure Land, to meditate on the glories of Pure Land and finally to transfer ones merits for the benefit of others.[68] The realization of birth in Pure Land by the individual practitioner is not the ultimate objective of this text. The practice of transferring merits to enable all beings to achieve birth in the Pure Land is strongly articulated.[69] In *Sukhāvatīvyūhopadeśa* we also see how the concept of the three Buddha-bodies (*trikāya*) is an important aspect of Pure Land devotionalism. Here the Buddha-land (*Sukhāvatī*) represents *dharmakāya*, Buddha Amitāyus *saṃbhogakāya* and the Bodhisattvas *nirmāṅakāya*. The three bodies form one entity but it is through Buddha Amitāyus (*saṃbhogakāya*) that all beings can be reborn in the Pure Land.[70]

Those involved in the cult of Amitābha practised meditation to receive visions of Amitābha in the present life or through rebirth in Sukhāvatī.[71] We have also seen that the practice of meditation in front of images of Amitābha or other Buddhas was widely used. It is also important to remember the influence of the *Sārvastivāda* school from Kashmir upon early Buddhism in China and what later became the Pure Land tradition. There are a countless later Pure Land texts and biographies of eminent monks who devoted their lives to the cult of Amitābha, but it would take us too far from our subject to go more closely into the matter of later Pure Land devotionalism in China and Japan. We stop here around the first half of the sixth century, before the time when Pure Land became recognized as a distinct form of Buddhism.[72]

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[67] Ibid., pp. 58–61.
[68] M Kiyota, "Buddhist Devotional Meditation. A Study of the *Sukhāvatīvyūhopadeśa*", *Mahāyāna Buddhist Meditation. Theory and Practice*, Edited by M Kiyota (Honolulu: University Press of Hawai'i, 1978), p. 278.
[69] Kiyota, "Buddhist Devotional Meditation ...", p. 259.
[70] Ibid., pp. 262–267.
[71] Kloppenborg, Poelmeyer, "Visualizations ...", p. 84.
[72] Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land* ..., p. 2.

3.2.8 Visualization in Tantric Buddhism

In Tantric Buddhism there is a rich and still living tradition of visualization. *Sādhana*, which means realization, is the name of a special kind of text that describes the elements of visualization. The word *sādhana* is also used as a more general term for all the ritual practices associated with visualization.[73] The large pantheon of deities is a remarkable feature of the tradition. A *sādhana* text also consists of descriptions of the deity involved. The practice of *sādhana* is performed in two stages. First, the meditator studies the features of the deity. He then gradually visualizes the deity until he can see it in his mind as if it were living. As a second stage he identifies himself with the deity and becomes one with it. By visualizing himself as the deity the meditator takes on some of its power and virtues which are symbolically expressed in many details of its appearance.[74]

There is much to say about visualization and similar practices in Tantric Buddhism. This is true about the old Tibetan Nyingma school in particular. It may, however, be sufficient to observe that the tantric tradition of visualization is a later development in line with *buddhānusmṛti* practice. We may as a conclusion to this short section about Tantric Buddhism also point to the fact that in Tibet there is a clear connection between *buddhānusmṛti* and images of the Buddha. Yael Bentor has recently shown that *buddhānusmṛti* practice is part of the ritual that takes place in the consecration of Buddha images in Tibet.[75]

3.3 *Buddhānusmṛti* Practice in the Making of Aniconic Art

3.3.1 Sources—*Vimuttimagga* and *Visuddhimagga*

My main sources regarding Buddhist meditation are two manuals of Buddhist doctrines, the *Vimuttimagga* by Upatissa and the *Visuddhimagga* by Buddhaghosa. *Vimuttimagga* is a less well-known text than *Visuddhimagga*. The former must have been written somewhere between the 1st and 4th century AD. It was written in India not later than the 5th century AD, as a Chinese translation was made of it in AD 505. The author was called Upatissa. A *thera* with the name Upatissa is mentioned in the *Parivāra* of the *Vinaya-piṭaka*. If this Upatissa is the author of *Vimuttimagga*, the text may be as early as the 1st century AD.[76] The way to practise meditation was to a high degree transmitted

[73] L O Gómez, “Two Tantric Meditations. Visualizing the Deity” *Buddhism in Practice*. Edited by D S Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 318.
[74] P Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism. Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 266–267.
[75] Y Bentor, *Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 120–124.
[76] Norman, *Pāli Literature* ..., p. 113.

orally in early Buddhism, and Upatissa had without doubt some of that oral tradition at hand when he wrote his handbook. Buddhaghosa wrote the well-known *Visuddhimagga* in the 5th century AD. It is regarded as authoritative on Theravāda meditation. Buddhaghosa is better known as a learned scholar than a meditator. There seems no doubt that Buddhaghosa made use of *Vimuttimagga* when writing *Visuddhimagga*. There are many similarities between the two texts and they are divided into the same three sections, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. The third section, however, is much more developed in *Visuddhimagga*.

The whole *Vimuttimagga* was probably not written at the same time. There seems to have been an older part and later additions. The main differences between *Vimuttimagga* and *Visuddhimagga* seem to be the way the ascetic practices are described. The chapter about the thirteen ascetic practices (*dhutaguṇa*) reflects a non monastic context, except the last part which is more in accordance with the monasticized *Visuddhimagga*. *Vimuttimagga* may have been created and used by forest dwellers, unlike the later *Visuddhimagga* which had its root among the monastic dwellers. It has also been suggested that the *Vimuttimagga* was produced by or connected with the Abhayagiri school.[77]

3.3.2 Buddhist Concentration

We will now try to understand in what way practitioners of *buddhānusmṛti* were able to create visions of the Buddha at a period before the appearance of anthropomorphic images of the Buddha. Before we turn to the practice of *buddhānusmṛti* I will start with a description of two different techniques of meditation. What occurs in the mind of the meditator during these two techniques will then be compared with *buddhānusmṛti*. The first technique is mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*). This is a widely used technique and has been described by several scholars. The second is concentration on *kasiṇa* devices. This is a technique rarely practised today, but Buddhaghosa describes it in detail.

3.3.2.1 Mindfulness of Breathing

Mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) is one of the most widely practised meditative techniques in Buddhism. It is described in a number of *sūtras* in the Pāli canon and explained in detail in the *Visuddhimagga* and many later manuals on meditation. *Ānāpānasati* is described as a form of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*). The first mention of this *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation comes in the

[77] Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India* ..., pp. 298, 319 n. 23. Norman, *Pāli Literature* ..., p. 113. H Bechert, "Remarks on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature in Sri Lanka from the 9th Century until the End of the Dambadeṇiya Period". *Sūryacandrāya. Essays in Honour of Akira Yuyama on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday.* Edited by P Harrison and G Schopen. Indica et Tibetica Bd. 35 (Swisttal-Odendorf: Indica-et-Tibetica Verlag, 1998), p. 4.

famous *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta,* which occurs twice in the canon, a longer version in *Dīgha-nikāya* (*Mahāsatipaṭṭhānasutta*) and a shorter one in *Majjhima-nikāya.* The text is nearly the same and the only difference is that the longer version has a detailed treatment of the four noble truths included in the text. The meditation practice proclaimed in *Satipaṭṭhānasutta* is said to lead to the realization of *nirvāṇa.*

> "There is, monks, this one way to the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and distress, for the disappearance of pain and sadness, for the gaining of the right path, for the realisation of nibbāna:—that is to say the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhānā*)". (DN II:290)[78]

Thereafter, the text continues to describe how to practice mindfulness of the body (*kāya*), of the feelings (*vedanā*), of the mind (*citta*) and of the mental objects (*dhamma*). Briefly, to be mindful is to be aware of everything that occupies the mind. Edward Conze is of the opinion that mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) concerns the initial stages of meditation. "Like concentration, it provides calm, like wisdom it develops insight,—but both to a lesser degree".[79] The four forms of *satipaṭṭhāna* are objects of contemplation. Mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) is one form of mindfulness of the body (*kāya*). It is described as being done in the following way in *Mahāsatipaṭṭhānasutta.*

> "Here a monk, having gone into the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty place, sits down crosslegged, holding his body erect, having established mindfulness before him. Mindfully he breathes in, mindfully he breathes out. Breathing in a long breath, he knows that he breathes in a long breath, and breathing out a long breath, he knows that he breathes out a long breath". (DN II:291)[80]

Mindfulness of breathing is sometimes described as a simple but effective technique. The description that follows is mainly from the experience of Rod Bucknell.[81] The practitioner sits in a comfortable position and closes his eyes. He should focus his attention on the slight tactile sensation experienced at the rim of the nostrils as the breath passes in and out. However, fixing one's attention on the breathing process is extremely difficult, because the mind again and again wanders to some irrelevant topic. When the meditator is able to keep his attention fixed on the breathing for several minutes without losing his concentration he may reach a condition called mental one-pointedness. Mental one-pointedness is described as a condition of great pleasure and contentment.

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[78] [*Dīgha-Nikāya*]. *Thus have I Heard* ..., p. 335. See also [*Dīgha-Nikāya*]. *Dialogues* ..., Part 2, p. 327.

[79] E Conze, *Buddhist Meditation* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), pp. 28–29.

[80] [*Dīgha-Nikāya*]. *Thus have I Heard* ..., p. 335–336. See also [*Dīgha-Nikāya*]. *Dialogues* ..., Part 2, p. 328.

[81] R S Bucknell, M Stuart-Fox, *The Twilight Language. Explorations in Buddhist Meditation and Symbolism* (Richmond: Carzon Press, 1986), pp. 36–48. R S Bucknell, "Reinterpreting the Jhānas" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies.* Vol. 16:2 (1993), pp. 390–394.

A remarkable change occurs after a prolonged period of one-pointedness. The meditator feels a quality that he had lacked before because all his minds have been purified from negative qualities. During this phase of the practice the meditator often finds the body making strange involuntary movements, for example a pronounced trembling, intermittent jerking or creeping goose-flesh. These strange movements are by-products and cease if the meditator resumes the concentration practice. Soon a new effect appears. A feeling of lightness as if the body were floating some distance above the seat or a pervading warmth as if the body were glowing. These feelings are also by-products and the meditator should return to the object of concentration.

The meditator who succeedes in halting his mental wandering can, through further prolonged concentration, deepen the state of one-pointedness and thereby bring about various changes in his perception of the meditation object. If the meditator continues with this practice the concentration object is likely to undergo a transformation. The tactile sensation is replaced by a visual image (*nimitta*). Bucknell and Stuart-Fox describe this as "... a large, glowing crescent suspended in the midst of a black nothingness".[82] For Nyanaponika Thera it "... appear a simple mental image (*nimitta*), like a star, etc., heralding full absorption".[83] Hereafter, the meditator begins each session in the usual way by concentrating on his breathing. As soon as the *nimitta* arises he concentrates on that instead.

In short, when practising *ānāpānasati* the meditator focuses his attention on the breath passing in and out. If he is able to keep his attention on the breathing without loosing his concentration he may reach a condition where the object of concentration undergoes a transformation. The tactile sensation when the breath passes in and out is replaced by a visual image (*nimitta*). This *nimitta* is described as a crescent or a star.

3.3.2.2 Kasiṇa Meditation

Dieter Schlingloff calls attention to the fact that objects used in meditation can create signs at two different levels, *aufgefasste* and *sublimiertes Zeichen*. He also points out that it is at the highest level that a sign creates visions. "Erst auf dieser höchsten Ebene bilden solche Zeichen die Grundlage für visionäre Erscheinungen".[84] Schlingloff's view about these two levels is taken from the *Visuddhimagga*. There are in the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Vimuttimagga*, descriptions of these two *nimitta* images, the mental-image (*uggaha-nimitta*) and the after-image (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*). This division into levels has also been described by present day meditators.[85] To understand the differences between these different levels in meditation it is important for us to turn our attention to the use of *kasiṇa* devices as explained by Buddhaghosa and Upatissa.

[82] Bucknell, Stuart-Fox, *The Twilight Language* ..., p. 44.
[83] Nyanaponika Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation. A Handbook of Mental Training Based on the Buddha's Way of Mindfulness* (London: Rider, 1983 (1962)), p. 111.
[84] Schlingloff, *Die Bedeutung* ..., p. 321.
[85] Bucknell, "Reinterpreting the ...", p. 388.

A *kasiṇa* is a kind of *maṇḍala*, built up as a means for the practitioner to be concentrated and mentally steady. *Kasiṇa* literally means "entire", "whole".[86] There are ten different *kasiṇa* described in *Visuddhimagga*; earth (*pathavī-kasiṇa*), water (*āpo-kasiṇa*), fire (*tejo-kasiṇa*), air (*vāyo-kasiṇa*), blue (*nīla-kasiṇa*), yellow (*pīta-kasiṇa*), red (*lohita-kasiṇa*), white (*odāla-kasiṇa*), light (*āloka-kasiṇa*) and space (*ākasa-kasiṇa*).[87] We can already find ten *kasiṇas* in the *Sangītisutta* (DN III:268), but here it is consciousness (*viññāṇa-kasiṇa*) instead of light *kasiṇa*.[88] A *kasiṇa* can be rather simple. The meditator watches the top of a bamboo moving to and fro while he concentrates his mind on the air (air *kasiṇa*).[89] He may also make a hole in a piece of cloth and hang it in front of a fire. The meditator then sits in front of the hole and concentrates his mind on the fire (fire *kasina*).[90]

Concentration on a *kasiṇa* device takes place in three distinct stages. After constructing the *kasiṇa* and preparing himself for meditation, the practitioner sits down cross-legged in front of the *kasiṇa* with his body erect. He then establishes mindfulness within himself and starts to concentrate on the *kasiṇa* in front of him. (1) The first stage is a sense perception of the *kasiṇa* called *parikamma-nimitta*. (2) After prolonged contemplation a second stage called preliminary concentration (*parikamma-samādhi*) may arise and the device becomes a mental-image (*uggaha-nimitta*) in the mind of the practitioner. This *mental-image* has also been translated as *learned sign*[91] or *grasped sign*[92] and by Schlingloff it is called *aufgefasste Zeichen*.[93] Once the meditator has created this mental-image he is able to visualize it whenever he wishes. (3) After continued practice the mental-image may as a third stage give place to an abstract idea or concept, an after-image (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*). This after-image has also been translated as *counterpart sign*[94] or *sublimated sign*[95] and by Schlingloff it is called *sublimiertes Zeichen*.[96] This after-image only appears when the practitioner has reached a deeper degree of concentration, known as access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*). This access concentration leads successively to absorption concentration (*appanā-samādhi*) and the first trance (*jhāna*) stages.[97] The after-image is a mental representation of the primal quality of the object and it is "a hundred times, a thousand times more purified, like a looking-glass disc".[98] This after-image "... remains in the mind as an

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[86] Rhys Davids, Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary* ..., p. 201.
[87] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* ..., pp. 118–172.
[88] [*Dīgha-Nikāya*]. *Thus have I heard* ..., p. 508.
[89] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* ..., p. 168.
[90] Ibid., p. 167.
[91] Ñyāṇamoli´s glossary in, B Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* ... p. 886.
[92] Conze, *Buddhist Thought* ..., p. 254.
[93] Schlingloff, *Die Bedeutung* ..., p. 321.
[94] Ñyāṇamoli´s glossary in, Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* ... p. 891.
[95] Conze, *Buddhist Tought* ..., p. 254.
[96] Schlingloff, *Die Bedeutung* ..., p. 321.
[97] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* ..., pp. 124–125.
[98] Ibid., p. 125.

emblematic representation of whole quality or element that it symbolizes".[99] But, it has neither colour nor shape.[100]

The way to practice concentration on kasiṇa devices is described in *Vimuttimagga* almost in the same way as in the *Visuddhimagga*. There are ten *kasiṇas* described in the *Vimuttimagga*, but contrary to the *Visuddhimagga* they are the same as those mentioned in *Sangītisutta* (DN).[101] The earth *kasiṇa* is first and described in most detail as in the *Visuddhimagga*. After the usual preliminaries, selecting a calm place etc., the meditator concentrates his mind on the device until a mental-image arises from the device in his mind. Exactly as in the *Visuddhimagga* this mental image may give place to a sign on a higher level. This sign is called *after image* and appears when the meditator has attained *access meditation*.[102]

3.3.2.3 Visual Images (Nimitta)

Even if *kasiṇa* devices are rarely used today, the description of how to use them is important because the sequences in concentration are largely the same, irrespective of which object or technique is used.[103] Bucknell brought to the fore the practice of mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) and showed that it resembled meditation on *kasiṇa* devices. The sensation experienced at the rim of the nostril, as the breath passes in and out, is in this meditation technique the object on which the meditator concentrates. The visual image (*nimitta*) that occurs during this practice corresponds with the after-image we have seen in *kasiṇa* meditation. It seems that even a sensation at the nostrils can arouse a visual image in the mind of the practitioner. The use of visual objects or mantra-like formulas seem, however, to differ in one important way from the practice of *ānāpānasati*. There seems to be an extra level when meditating on a visual object or a text. During *ānāpānasati* the mental-image is not perceptible. With a visual object, the meditator begins with the eyes open, but closes them once the object has imprinted itself on the memory so that it can be visualized clearly in the mind of the meditator. The mental-image becomes the new concentration object. The same happens when concentrating on a text. The meditator begins by repeating the phrase softly until he or she can hear it inwardly.[104] It is important to remember that the mental image (*uggaha-nimitta*) that arises when using a visual object (*kasiṇa*) also occurs as a visual image. During meditation upon a text (*buddhānusmṛti*) the mental images occur instead as a sound in the mind of the meditator. The mental image during *ānāpānasati* is, however, not clearly recognisable. The reason for this is that it is

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[99] P Vajirañāna Mahāthera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, 3rd Edition (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1987), p. 145.
[100] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purifucation* ..., p. 125.
[101] Upatissa, *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimagga)*. Translated from the Chinese by N R M Ehara, Soma Thera and Kheminda Thera (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995 (1961)), p. 63.
[102] Upatissa, *The Path of Freedom* ..., pp. 77–79.
[103] Bucknell, "Reinterpreting the ...", p. 389.
[104] Ibid., p. 393.

impossible to turn off the original sensation when the breath passes in and out.[105]

Comparative studies suggest that the developmental stages in meditation are more than expectation effects resulting from a religious belief system.[106] A study comparing three different techniques of meditation, using the Tibetan *Mahāmudrā*, the Hindu *Yogasūtras* and the Theravāda *Vipassanā*, suggests that the stages of meditation are of cross-cultural and universal applicability. Both the mental image and after image described in *Visuddhimagga* have their counterpart in *Yogasūtras* and *Mahāmudrā*.[107]

3.3.2.4 Buddhānusmṛti Practice

The essence of *buddhānusmṛti* for Buddhaghosa is the ten epithets (*adhivacana*) of the Buddha. We have already seen (chapter 3.2.3.2) the formula in different Pāli *nikāyas*. It is a mantra-like listing of titles and attributes much like a confession of faith. The meditator "... should go into solitary retreat in a favourable abode and recollect the special qualities of the Enlightened One, the Blessed One".[108] To recite the Buddha's epithets, and the descriptions of the epithets, was a way to concentrate the mind in the same way as it was proclaimed in the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*. But it has also another goal. To practice *buddhānusmṛti* is a way to feel the presence of the Buddha. It is a way to be near to the Buddha himself.

> "When a bhikkhu is devoted to this recollection of the Buddha ... he cames to feel as if he were living in the Master's presence ... as though he were face to face with the Master".[109]

Only twenty-two of the forty different ways of practising meditation that are explained in *Visuddhimagga* may create after-images. The ten recollections are not included in that list.[110] Thus, recollection of the Buddha (*buddha-anusmṛti*) can create a mental-image that the practitioner constantly has in his mind wherever he is. It should be observed, however, that *buddhānusmṛti* cannot create an after-image. This is something that Schlingloff seems to disregard, but it is obvious in regard to *Visuddhimagga*.

> "—of these forty meditation subjects, twenty-two have counterpart signs as object, that is to say, the ten kasinas, the ten kinds of foulness, mindfulness of breathing, and mindfulness occupied with the body; the rest do not have counterpart signs as object".[111] (VS III:117)

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105 Ibid., pp. 393–394.
106 Brown, Engler, "The Stages of Mindfulness Meditation ...", p. 187.
107 D P Brown, "The Stages of Meditation in Cross-Cultural Perspective" *Transformations of Consciousness. Conventional and Contemplative Perspectives on Development.* Edited by K Wilber, J Engler and D P Brown (Boston: Shambhala, 1986), pp. 236–238.
108 Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* ..., p. 192.
109 Ibid., p. 209.
110 Ibid., p. 112.
111 Loc. cit.

In practising *buddhānusmṛti* the meditator feels as if he is living *face to face* with the Buddha and in the *Master's presence*. He is also able to visualize this mental-image of the Buddha in his mind whenever he wishes. Regarding Buddhaghosa, however, it is impossible to create an after-image (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*) with the practice of *buddhānusmṛti*. The object may only become a mental-image (*uggaha-nimitta*). The practice of *buddhānusmṛti* may for Buddhaghosa only be a preparation for deeper meditation. Nowhere is it mentioned by him that *buddhānusmṛti* leads to a deeper level of concentration.

There is an important difference between *Visuddhimagga* and *Vimuttimagga* regarding the way to practise *buddhānusmṛti*. In the *Vimuttimagga* there is no such statement that *buddhānusmṛti* only should be a preparation for deeper meditations. Instead in the *Vimuttimagga* it is clearly stated that the four *jhyāna* stages could arise during *buddhānusmṛti*.[112] This clearly contradicts what Buddhaghosa wrote because he does not believe that *buddha-anusmṛti* leads to the first *jhyāna* stage. Upatissa's view is more in line with what we have seen in *Anguttara Nikāya*, that the practice of *buddhānusmṛti* could lead to "... tranquillity, full comprehension, to perfect enlightenment, to *nibbāna*".[113]

3.3.2.5 Critique

It is time now to seriously call the theory proposed by Dieter Schlingloff in question. He believes that a wheel may signify the *dharma*, a semicircle the entrance into *nirvāṇa* and a tree the enlightenment of the Buddha. The early followers of the Buddha could just draw a wheel, a semicircle or a tree or scratch it in the sand or on the ground before they start to meditate. When a meditator began to concentrate on the object, the object together with what it represented became an image (*nimitta*) in his mind. This is how aniconic images originated according to Schlingloff. They originated as a sign "... served to aid meditation on the Buddha".[114] The artist has only to imitate and develop these easily made symbols. Unfortunately, Schlingloff makes no reference to where in the literature we can find references to trees, wheels and *stūpas* used as meditation objects. Nowhere in *Visuddhimagga* nor in *Vimuttimagga* is it mentioned that painted symbols like a tree, a wheel or a *stūpa* were used as objects in meditation.

Furthermore, Schlingloff takes it for granted that there was already a connection between visual signs and events in the life of the Buddha in this early period. Monks meditated upon trees because these were connected with the enlightenment, etc. He also believes that the signs and the events in the life of the Buddha were a given condition. This opinion must be questioned. We will in a later chapter see that the connection between visual signs and events in the life of the Buddha may not be as old as it is commonly believed. Instead, the

[112] Upatissa, *The Path of Freedom* ..., p. 148.
[113] [*Aṅguttara-Nikāya*]. *The Book of Gradual* ..., Vol. 1, p. 27.
[114] Schlingloff, "The Oldest Painting ...", p. 3.

development of art and literature may instead have been a gradual and mutual process. Art and literature existed in close connection. Both inspired and influenced each other. Therefore, if the connection between the tree and the enlightenment and between the wheel and the first sermon did not exist until a couple of centuries after the life of the Buddha, it is impossible to agree with the arguments of Schlingloff.

Schlingloff points to a very important fact when he calls attention to the reciprocity between Buddhist art and meditation. However, he seems to stress more the influence meditation had on art than the influence in the other direction. Was it really the practice of meditation that influenced Buddhist art? Instead, the main influence may have been in the opposite way. There is every reason to believe that the early Buddhists adopted an already existing form of art with many sacred and auspicious signs. Visual signs like sacred trees and wheels may have preceded and influenced the telling of the life of the Buddha. In the next chapter I will concentrate on the transformation of Buddhist aniconic art, and thereafter discuss whether Buddhist aniconic art derived from an older common form of Indian art. If this was the case, we must consider that it is much more likely that early Buddhist art did influence the themes and objects of meditation. However, we may conclude that the evolution of Buddhist art and Buddhist meditational practices were mutually dependent upon each other.

3.4 Summary

Buddhānusmṛti was an important contemplative practice in early Buddhism. Its importance is apparent from the fact that it was practised in many, if not all different Buddhist traditions. It was certainly not some degenerated practice introduced by an ignorant lay public or by some relaxed monks. Nearly everywhere in the canon where *buddhānusmṛti* is discussed it is arranged together in series with other recollections. Most of these places are arranged in series of three, six or ten recollections. The first three are always *buddha*, *dharma* and *saṅgha*. This indicates that recollection of the *buddha*, *dharma* and *saṅgha* must have come into existence at an earlier date than the others. Furthermore, there are several places in the canon and elsewhere that give a description of the *Buddha* with ten epithets (*adhivacana*). This tenfold formula is a list of titles or attributes used as aids when meditating upon the Buddha and his moral and mental examples.

The origin of *buddhānusmṛti* may be traced back to a contemplative form of worship (*upāsana*) present in the *Upaniṣads* and *Āraṇyakas*. Converted monks familiar with *upāsana* probably brought this kind of contemplation with them when they became Buddhists. This must have happened at an early period as we have seen that the practice of *buddhānusmṛti* belongs to the oldest parts of the canon. In *Suttanipāta* we read about a visual image of the Buddha. A

"mental seeing" (*manasā cakkhunā*) of the Buddha is described as a way to see him and to follow him without having the possibility of following him personally. Also in *Visuddhimagga* we read that the result of *buddhānusmṛti* is to feel as if one were living face to face with the Buddha.

In later times there was a clear connection between *buddhānusmṛti* and images of the Buddha. *Buddhānusmṛti* practice was, at least as early as the 2nd century, not only directed to the mental attributes of the Buddha, but also to his bodily forms. We have also seen that *buddhānusmṛti* was practised in front of images of the Buddha and is still part of the ritual that consecrates a new image of the Buddha.

Mental images may arise in the mind of the meditator when he is able to focus his attention on an object for a long time without losing his concentration. The meditator is thereafter able to visualize this mental-image whenever he wishes, and use it for further concentration instead of the original object. The mental-image may also become transformed to a higher level. Visions at the higher level (after-image) seem to a high degree be very similar to each other, independent of the kind of meditational practice. The after-image is described like a star,[115] a cluster of gems,[116] a large glowing crescent[117] or like a mother-of-pearl dish well washed,[118] but is has neither colour nor shape.[119]

When meditating upon an image of the Buddha, the meditator is able to visualize the mental-image of the Buddha in his mind. When practising *buddhānusmṛti* the meditator uses the epithets of the Buddha as a mantra-like formula, a recital text. He is then, according to Buddhaghosa, able to feel that he is living face to face with the Buddha. If a visual object is used in meditation, the mental-image that arises in the mind of the meditator resembles to certain degrees that object. If the object instead is a mantra-like formula the meditator can hear the formula as a mental-image in his mind, but he can not see the mental-image as a visual image.

Neither Buddhaghosa nor Upatissa mention trees, wheels or any other kind of aniconic signs in connection with meditation. These signs are not mentioned in the canonical writings either. Furthermore, when practising *buddha-anusmṛti* the meditators did not use visual objects. Instead, they recited the ten epithets of the Buddha. The mental-image that might occur in the mind during such practices was not a visual image. *It is therefore not possible to find a textual basis for the connection between aniconic signs and buddhānusmṛti.* Although the practice of *buddhānusmṛti* is to recite the ten epithets of the Buddha, Buddhaghosa seems to indicate a visual image of the Buddha as a result. He describes the situation where the meditator may feel as if he is living face to face with the Buddha when practising *buddhānusmṛti.*

[115] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* ..., p. 277. Nyanaponika Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* ..., p. 111.
[116] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* ..., p. 277.
[117] Bucknell, Stuart-Fox, *The Twilight Language* ..., p. 44.
[118] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* ..., p. 125.
[119] Ibid., p. 125.

The importance of *buddhānusmṛti* in early Buddhism is not an evidence that meditation upon the Buddha was the origin of aniconic Buddhist art. Neither is the connection between art and meditation in later times any evidence of the proposed influence of meditation upon Buddhist art. It is much more likely that early Buddhist art influenced the way of practising meditation. Furthermore, it is often preconceived that the signs proposed as having served as meditational devices were from the beginning connected with events in the life of the Buddha. The theory that aniconic art arose from meditational devices presupposes this connection. In later chapters we will discuss the beginning and development of this connection. There is every reason to believe that this connection between signs and events in the life of the Buddha may not be as old as it is commonly believed.

CHAPTER 4

Towards a Chronology of Buddhist Aniconic Art

4.1 Introduction

Those who believe that Buddhist aniconic art can be explained as a result of a religious or philosophical doctrine, or that its origin is derived from a prohibition on depicting the Buddha anthropomorphically, or that it arose from a meditational practice, seem to neglect the art itself and its development. They regard visual art only as a symptom of something else and neglect its importance in everyday Buddhist religious life. They neglect the fact that Buddhist visual art may have influenced other aspects of Buddhism as well. Therefore, I will in this chapter concentrate on the development of Buddhist aniconic art.

Some scholars have recognized a development in Buddhist aniconic art. Albert Foucher, for example, believed that Buddhist aniconic art had its origin in pilgrimages to sacred Buddhist sites.[1] Ananda Coomaraswamy was also of the opinion that old Indian signs came to be used to designate the four great events in the life of the Buddha.[2] In addition, Ludwig Bachhofer described the development of early Indian sculpture from a historical point of view.[3] Even if Dietrich Seckel believes that it was the nature of the Buddha that prevented the Buddhists from making images of him, he is aware that Buddhist aniconic art developed out of early Indian signs.[4] Dieter Schlingloff is also aware of a development of Buddhist art. Although this does not cause him give up his theory that Buddhist art arose from a meditational practice.

However, no serious attempt to document this development has been made by these scholars. Therefore, in this chapter I will concentrate on this development of Buddhist aniconic art. I will base this study on a couple of important Buddhist sites. For each site, I will try to document and date different ways of depicting aniconic signs. The art at these sites will hopefully disclose a line of development that makes it possible to construct a preliminary chronology of Buddhist aniconic art. There are a host of lesser-known sites that after detailed studies may improve this preliminary chronology.

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[1] Foucher, *The Beginning of Buddhist Art* ..., p. 13.
[2] Coomaraswamy, “The Origin of ...”, pp. 290–294.
[3] L Bachhofer, *Early Indian Sculpture* (Paris: Pegasus Press, 1929).
[4] Seckel, *Jenseits des Bildes* ..., p. 9.

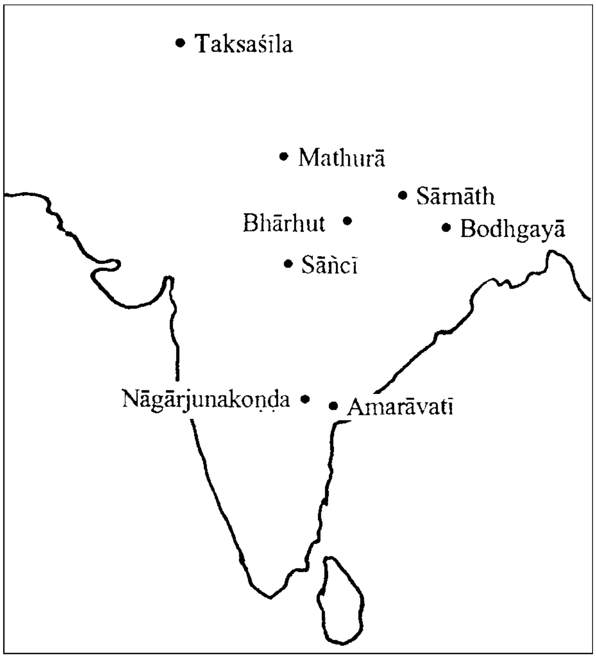


Fig. 6. Some important Buddhist sites.

4.2 Sāñcī

4.2.1 Introduction

Sāñcī is a Buddhist site in Madhya Pradesh, 70 km from Bhopal. It consists of 51 monuments dating from the 3rd century BC to the 13th century AD. It was discovered by the Europeans in 1818 when General Taylor of the Bengal Cavalry encamped near the ruins. Captain E Fell soon thereafter wrote the first account for *Calcutta Journal* of July 1819. The Buddhists left Sāñcī in the 13th century, but the remains were in a relatively good state of preservation at the beginning of the 20th century. Three of the four gateways round the main *stūpa* (*stūpa* 1) were still standing. Sāñcī became famous among westerners, but unfortunately this made it the victim of treasure hunters and amateur archaeologists. The political agent in Bhopal, Herbert Maddock, and his assistant Captain Johnson, opened *stūpa* 1 in 1822 in search for treasures. This resulted in serious damage to the *stūpa* and caused the western gateway to collapse. Alexander Cunningham came to Sāñcī in 1851, and found relics in both *stūpa* 2 and 3. Cunningham planned to send the two fallen gateways from *stūpa* 1 to the British Museum, but this failed because of the expense of the transport. Conservation of the remains was started in 1880. *Stūpa* 1 was cleaned from vegetation and repaired, and both the fallen gateways were re-erected. The first real excavation at Sāñcī was not done until Sir John Marshall arrived there. He led the excavations and conservation at the site between

1912 and 1919, and it is mainly his work that brought the monuments to their present condition.[5] Together with Alfred Foucher he published in 1940 *The Monuments of Sāñcī*, a work in three volumes.

4.2.2 Vidiśā

Sāñcī was not far from Vidiśā, the western capital of the Śuṅgas. Vidiśā had an important situation on the route linking Northern India, Deccan and Western India. It also seems to have been an important craft centre, particularly noted for ivory, weaving and sharp swords. Its political importance is emphasized by a stone pillar at the site set up by the envoy of the Indo-Greek king of Taxila (Taksaśīla) to the court of the king Kasiputra Bhagabhadra of Vidiśā.[6]

Apart from Sāñcī, there are several groups of Buddhist settlements in quiet and retired spots on sandstone hills within a radius of 20 kilometre from Vidiśā. Particularly impressive among these are the monuments at Sonari, Satdhara, Bhojpur and Andher. These groups are similar to and almost contemporaneous with *stūpa* 1, 2 and 3 in Sāñcī.[7]

4.2.3 Sāñcī at the Time of Aśoka

A brick *stūpa* no. 1 of about 18 metre in diameter (including the *medhi*) was erected at the time of Aśoka. It was crowned by an umbrella (*chattra*) of Chunar sandstone. A polished pillar of Chunar sandstone with a capital similar to the one at Sārnāth was erected at its side.[8]

The earliest written reference to Sāñcī is in chapter 17 in the *Mahāvaṁsa* where it is recorded that Mahinda, the son of Aśoka, visited his mother at Vidiśā and that both went to the monastery she had built at Vediśāgiri or Cetiyagiri.[9] Vediśāgiri is generally identified as the hill of Sāñcī.[10]

4.2.4 *Stūpa* 2

4.2.4.1 The Stūpa

Stūpa 2 is on a small terrace on the west side, halfway to the hilltop and was built to hold the relics of ten named Buddhist monks. It was Alexander Cun-

[5] D Mitra, "Discovery and Restoration of the Monuments", *Unseen Presence. The Buddha and Sanchi*, Edited by V Dehejia, (Mumbai: Marg Publication, 1996), p. 3–6.
[6] D K Chakrabarti, "Post-Mauryan States of Mainland South Asia (c. BC 185-AD 320)", *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia. The Emergence of Cities and States*. By F.R. Allchin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 303–304.
[7] D Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments* (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1971), p. 91.
[8] Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments* ..., pp. 23–24, 97.
[9] M D Willis, "Sanchi", *The Dictionary of Art*. Vol. 27. Edited by J Turner (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 708.
[10] Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments* ..., p. 97.

ningham who discovered the relics.[11] *Stūpa* 2 is a small *stūpa*, only circa 14 meters in diameter, excluding the circumambulation path and enclosing balustrade. It is approximately 8 meters to the top of the dome and 11 meters to the top of the umbrella.[12] It is an earthen mound faced with bricks. Its pathway for circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇāpatha*) was paved with stone slabs. Stone was also used for the stairway (*sopāna*) leading to the upper circular drum (*medhi*).

4.3.4.2 The Railing

The *stūpa* is surrounded by a richly decorated stone railing (*vedikā*), 2 m 30 cm in height with four entrances. The design of the railing discloses that a wooden railing must have preceded it.[13] The railing consists of 88 uprights (*stambha*), connected by three sets of cross-bars (*sūci*) and topped with a coping (*uṣṇīṣa*). There are no carvings on the copings and crossbars. Each upright is carved on both faces with full medallions in the centre and half medallions at the ends (fig. 7). The main motif on the uprights is lotus flowers. Nearly 300 out of 444 medallions consist of different varieties of lotus flowers. The carvings on the railings make the *stūpa* most interesting for those who wish to understand the development of early Buddhist art. John Marshall believed that the sculptures of *stūpa* 2 date from the last quarter of the second century BC and probably from about 110 BC. He also believed that they constitute an especially valuable landmark in the evolution of Indian art, as distinct from the foreign, official art of the Mauryas.[14] The railing is datable to somewhere between 100 and 150 BC. M D Willis believes it as old as circa 150 BC[15] and Coomaraswamy thought it to be from between 184 and 72 BC.[16] Benjamin Rowland and Debala Mitra suggest a date in the last quarter of the second century.[17] We must have in mind that these dating are based on palaeographical studies and on the style of the reliefs only. In order to discuss the carvings we have to divide them into three groups.

4.2.4.3 Group A

Group A consists of all the railing uprights except those at the four entrances. They are all decorated with medallions, a full one at the centre and half medallions above and below (fig. 7). Most of them depict lotus flowers. The rest are decorated with real animals, mythological creatures, plants and human beings.

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[11] A Cunningham, *The Bhilsa Topes or Buddhist Monuments of Central India. Comprising a Brief Historical Sketch of the Rise, Progress and Decline of Buddhism; with an Account of the Opening and Examination of the Various Groups of Topes around Bhilsa* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997 (1854)), pp. 285–294.

[12] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñchī* ..., p. 79.

[13] Remains of a wooden railing have been found at Pauni and I think it is likely that there have been wooden railings around all *stūpas* in Mauryan and maby even in early post-Mauryan times.

[14] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñchī* ..., p. 95.

[15] Willis, "Sanchi ...", p. 708.

[16] Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian* ..., p. 35.

[17] Rowland, *The Art and Architecture* ..., p. 84. D Mitra, *Sanchi*, 6th Edition (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1992), p. 63.

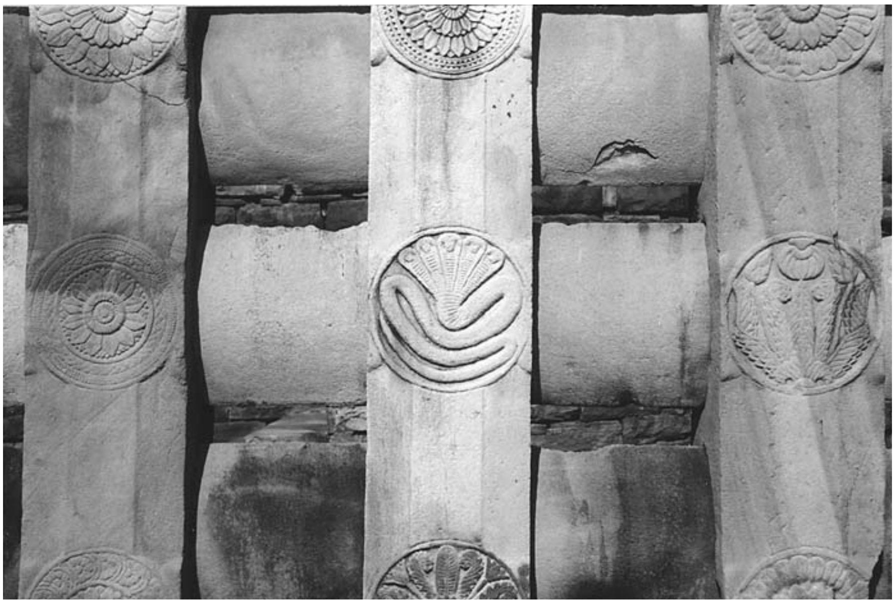


Fig. 7. Nāga and lotus flowers on railing. Sāñcī *stūpa* 2, railing uprights and cross-bars, 2nd century BC.

Among the real animals we find horses, elephants, lions, buffaloes, rhinoceros, squirrels and camels. Among the mythological creatures there are dwarfs, *makaras*, *nāgas*, *nāgīs*, *yakṣas*, a horse with a human head and a woman with a head of a horse. All signs in group A seem to be non-narrative iconic or symbolic signs.

Rowland has proposed that the animals and birds on the railing were intended to evoke the stories of the previous lives of the Buddha.[18] However, a sign does not refer to the life or lives of the Buddha just because it is depicted on a Buddhist building. There is one medallion that has been interpreted as an indexical sign pointing to the Buddha during his great departure simply because it is a horse without a rider (fig. 8). The mere existence of a horse is not sufficient evidence to justify its interpretation as an indexical sign of the Buddha, especially as animals of different kinds are common in early Buddhist art. It is also possible to find depictions of horses with riders on their backs from this early period,[19] but no one has interpreted these as anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha.

4.2.4.4 Group B

Group B consists of the railing uprights at the four L-shaped entrances, except those in group C. These uprights are carved on the whole face, from top to

[18] Rowland, *The Art and Architecture* ..., p. 85.
[19] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments* ..., p. 187–188, Pl. 82: 40b, 86: 63b, 90: 82a, 84b.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Fig. 8. Iconic sign of horse. Sāñcī *stūpa* 2, railing uprights, 2nd century BC. From: J Marshall, A Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñcī*. Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1940. Vol. 3, pl. 88, 74b.

Fig. 9. Iconic sign of sacred tree. Sāñcī *stūpa* 2, entrance pillar, 2nd century BC.

bottom. Nevertheless, the carvings look very archaic and if they were created later than those of group A, it cannot have been much later. At the north entrance, there is an iconic sign of a sacred tree. Garlands are hanging in the tree and at the top there is an umbrella (fig. 9). Another upright at the same entrance (fig. 10) has an iconic sign of a Mauryan pillar with elephants and a wheel at the top.


Fig. 10


Fig. 11

Fig. 10. Iconic sign of wheel pillar. Sāñcī *stūpa* 2, entrance pillar, 2nd century BC.

Fig. 11. Symbolic sign of Śrī Lakṣmī. Sāñcī *stūpa* 2, entrance pillar, 2nd century BC.

There has for a long time been a common belief that these and two other signs in group B are indexical signs depicting monoscenic narratives pointing to the life of the Buddha. It has been suggested that fig. 9 depicts the enlightenment of the Buddha and fig. 10 his first sermon. Similarly, his *parinirvāṇa* is believed to be represented by a *stūpa* and a relief depicting a woman surrounded by two elephants (fig. 11) is thought to be an indexical sign of his birth. Thus, it has been suggested by among others Marshall and Foucher,

Manjushree Rao, Debala Mitra and Benjamin Rowland,[20] that the carvings on the uprights in group B are indexical signs of the four major events in the life of the Buddha. Deheija, however, suggests instead that they are symbolic signs that refer to the Buddhist faith.[21]

I believe that there are no indexical signs pointing to the Buddha on *stūpa* 2. It is my firm conviction that all reliefs in group B, except for two that will be discussed below, consist of iconic signs of sacred trees, pillars, *stūpas* etc. It is important to notice that no *āsanas* or *buddhapādas* are depicted on them. The reason why they have been interpreted as indexical signs must be that the interpreters have been misled by later Buddhist art. Mireille Bénisti even goes so far as to believe that no art at *stūpa* 2 is typically Buddhist. She believes that the art in both group A and B represents a common older Indian tradition, that is not specifically Buddhist.[22] I agree with her in so far that the art on *stūpa* 2 is not exclusively Buddhist. As we will see later, sacred trees, wheels, lotus flowers, tridents etc. were not only used by Buddhists. However, when these signs were carved on a Buddhist *stūpa* some Buddhists may have already regarded them as Buddhist signs from an early date.

There are two signs that are difficult to interpret as iconic signs. The first of these is a symbolic sign (fig. 12) consisting of a lotus flower, a trident and a sixteen-spoked wheel on top of each other, all lifted by two dwarfs. These signs are of course Buddhist, but they are also common Indian signs used by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. The same three signs are also seen in Jain art. A pedestal belonging to a Jain image has these three symbolic signs depicted on top of each other (fig. 42) just like this Sāñcī upright.[23]

The other symbolic sign (fig. 11) is a relief depicting a female figure standing on a lotus flower between two elephants. This relief has been interpreted as representing the birth of the Buddha in the shape of Māyā, the mother of the Buddha. Without doubt, this relief represents Śrī Lakṣmī, the goddess of fortune, and nothing else, as has been clearly pointed out by Coomaraswamy.[24]

4.2.4.5 Group C

Group C consists of two uprights.[25] Both belong to a later period, probably when the gateways at *stūpa* 1 were made. There is nothing of interest for us in this group.

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[20] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments* ..., pp. 180–191. M Rao, *Sanchi Sculptures. An Aesthetic and Cultural Study* (New Delhi: Akay Book, 1994), pp. 77–78. Mitra, *Sanchi* ..., pp. 63–64. Rowland, *The Art and Architecture* ..., p. 85.

[21] Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art* ..., p. 77.

[22] M Bénisti, "Observations concernant le stūpa no 2 de Sāñcī. Résumé de la communication présentée, avec 38 projections, le 19 février 1986", *Bulletin d'Etudes Indiennes* 4 (1986), pp. 165–170.

[23] P Pal, *The Peaceful Liberators. Jain Art from India* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1994), p. 104, cat. 2.

[24] A K Coomaraswamy, "Early Indian Iconography. Śrī-Lakṣmī", *Eastern Art* 3 (1929), pp. 183–189.

[25] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments* ..., Pl. 78: 22a, 22b, 79: 27a, 27b.



Fig. 12. Symbolic sign depicting wheel, trident and lotus-flower. Sāñcī *stūpa* 2, entrance pillar, 2nd century BC.

4.2.4.6 Summary of the Art on Stūpa 2

There is relative agreement that the railing on *stūpa* 2 is datable to between 150 and 100 BC. The railing uprights are all decorated with medallions with animals, fabulous creatures, plants and human beings. The lotus flowers are the most frequently used signs. The uprights at the four entrances are carved on the whole face, from top to bottom and may have been added slightly later. Iconic signs of sacred trees, pillars and *stūpas* have been carved on the uprights at the four entrances, but there is nothing to indicate that they represent the life of the Buddha. Likewise, the relief commonly interpreted as representing the birth of the Buddha is a representation of the goddess Śrī Lakṣmī. Events in the life of the Buddha are not present in this early period of Buddhist art. They belong to a later period. There are also symbolic signs such as wheels and tridents depicted on the uprights. However, no *āsanas* or *buddhapādas* can be found on *stūpa* 2. Thus, the art on *stūpa* 2 cannot be said to be typically Buddhist. Instead, it is of a common Indian tradition shared by Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike.

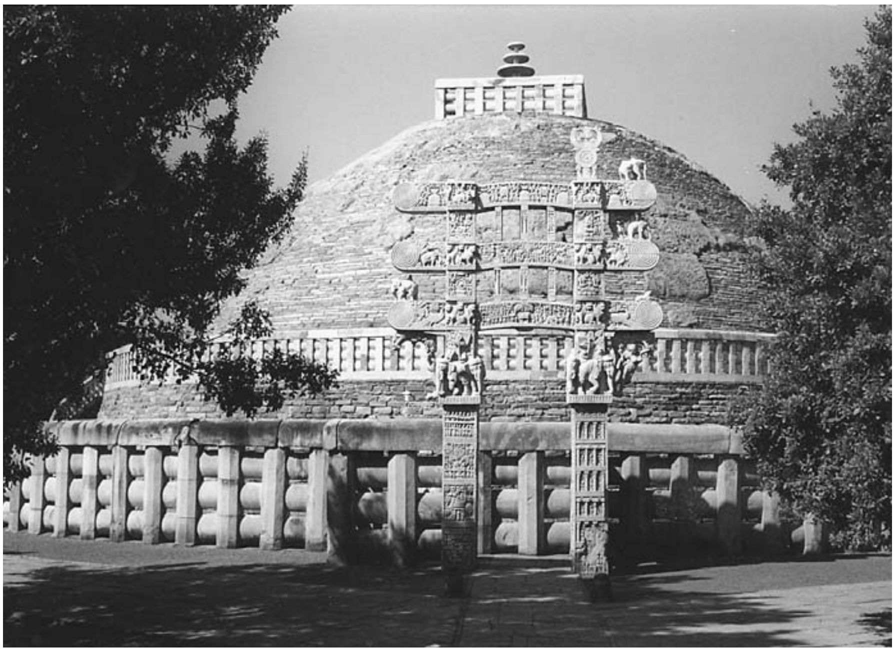


Fig. 13. Sāñcī *stūpa* 1, and eastern gateway.

4.2.5 *Stūpa* 1

4.2.5.1 The Stūpa

The diameter of *stūpa* 1 (fig. 13), or the Great *Stūpa*, is 36 metres and its height, excluding the umbrella, is 16 metres. The *stūpa* encases an earlier one from the time of Aśoka of about half its present dimensions. The *stūpa* underwent a complete reconstruction in the middle of the 2nd century BC and it is this building that exists today.[26] There are two circular pathways meant for circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇā patha*), one at the ground-level and one at the circular drum (*medhi*) which is possible to approach by a double stairway (*sopāna*) on the south-side. The pathways are both enclosed by railings (*vedikā*) made at that time. The *stūpa* is crowned by three umbrellas (*chattra*) within a square railing.

4.2.5.2 The Railings

The design of the stone railings (*vedikā*) at this *stūpa* is clearly influenced by wooden craftsmanship, just as those of *stūpa* 2. The railings at ground level were made in the middle of the 2nd century BC. Most of the uprights (*stambha*), crossbars (*sūci*) and coping stones (*uṣṇīsha*) are inscribed with names of donors, both laypeople, monks and nuns, but they do not consist of any carv-

[26] Mitra, *Sanchi* ..., pp. 15–16.

ings.[27] The upper pathway is also surrounded by a railing consisting of uprights, cross-bars and crowned by copings rounded at the top. It was probably made at the same time as the railing at the ground level or slightly later. The outer faces of the uprights are carved with one full medallion at the centre and two half medallions at the ends. As they are carved on the outer faces the carvings are not intended to be seen when circumambulating on the upper pathway. The reliefs on these uprights seem to be the oldest at *Sāñcī*. This is the opinion of Foucher, as they appear even more "clumsy" and "schematic"[28] than the reliefs at *stūpa* 2. These medallions contain a variety of motifs, mostly flowers and animals, but also human figures and mythological beings. The signs at the railing seem, just as the signs in group A at *stūpa* 2, to be nothing other than non-narrative iconic or symbolic signs. It is an art of a common Indian tradition, shared by Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike and cannot be said to be typically Buddhist.

4.2.5.3 The Gateways

Sometime in the late 1st century BC or the early 1st century AD four gateways (*toraṇa*) were added at the entrances. Each gateway is composed of two square pillars and supports a superstructure of three architraves with volute ends (fig. 13). Both sides of the architraves, as well as the various faces of the pillars, are sculpted. The height of the gateways, excluding crowning elements, is about eight and a half metre.

On the south gateway, which was the first to be built, is an inscription which relates that it is a gift of Ānaṁda, son of Vāsiṭhī, the foreman of the artisans of the Rājan Sirī Sātakaṇi.[29] Śri Sātakarṇi may be identified as one of the kings of Śātavāhana line, probably Sātakaṇi I. If we follow the short chronology of the Śātavāhana rule, this king must have gained power around 11 AD.[30] The long chronology suggested by Vincent Smith is for stylistic reasons impossible to follow, as the Śātavāhana line, according to him, is said to have begun in the 3rd century BC. Chakrabarti, following the chronology of H. C. Raychaudhuri, dates the rule of Sātakaṇi I to between 27–17 BC.[31] It is of no great importance whether we follow Huntington or Chakrabarti as the gateways according to them would either have been created in the last part of the 1st century BC or the first part of the 1st century AD.

There is at least 70 years between the reliefs on the railings on *stūpa* 2 and on the gateways on *stūpa* 1. But more likely there is 100 years or more or even as much as 150 years. Artistic creativity had during this period undergone a remarkable development. On the gateways there is a rich and clearly distin-

[27] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñchī* ..., p. 34.
[28] Ibid., p. 170.
[29] Ibid., p. 342.
[30] Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India* ..., pp. 93, 628–629n. 2–3.
[31] Chakrabarti, "Post-Mauryan states ...", pp. 279–280.

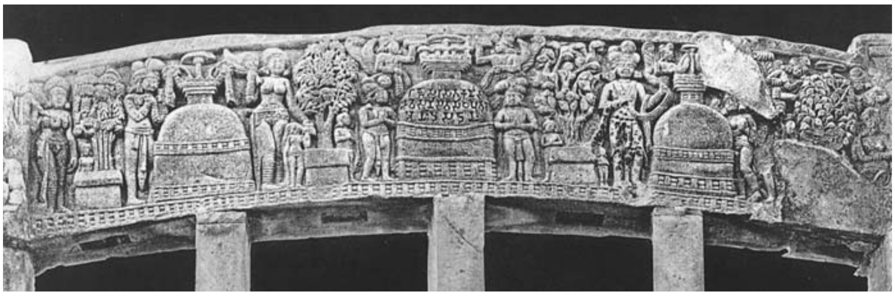


Fig. 14. Iconic sign of *bodhivṛkṣas* and *stūpas.* Sāñcī *stūpa* 1, late 1st century BC or early 1st century AD. From: J Marshall, A Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñcī.* Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1940. Vol. 2, pl. 40,1.

guished Buddhist art. The figures and details on the reliefs are deeply cut compared with the earlier art on *stūpa* 2. Both monoscenic, synoptic and continuous narrations are commonly used by the artists to depict a story.

4.2.5.4 Six Categories of Carvings

I have distinguished six different categories of carvings on the gateways.

(1) Indexical signs pointing to the Buddha and different events in his life (fig. 5, 16).
(2) Five *Jātaka* stories are depicted, *Chaddanta*, *Mahākapi*, *Vessantara*, *Alambasā* and *Sāma.*
(3) Iconic signs representing events in the history or legends of Buddhism, for example the visit to Rāmagrāma *stūpa* by Aśoka.
(4) Iconic signs of *bodhivṛkṣas* and *stūpas* (fig. 14). There are *bodhivṛkṣas* both of the previous *buddhas* and of the coming Buddha Maitreya.[32]
(5) Symbolic signs of wheels, tridents, *pūrṇaghaṭas* etc.
(6) Miscellaneous scenes and decorations, such as animals, plants and mythical creatures (fig. 15).

The first three categories cannot be found on *stūpa* 2. The fourth category, *bodhivṛkṣas* and *stūpas*, existed on *stūpa* 2 but in a simpler form. The different *bodhivṛkṣas* and *stūpas* are on *stūpa* 1 connected with specific Buddhas. All three categories 1, 4 and 5 have been called aniconic, but it is to the first category that the main aniconic signs belong and it must be examined more closely.

4.2.5.5 Indexical Signs of the Buddha

There are several indexical signs at the gateways that seem to depict the presence of the Buddha without his physical appearance. It is the narrative context

[32] Mitra, *Sanchi* ..., pp. 40–41.

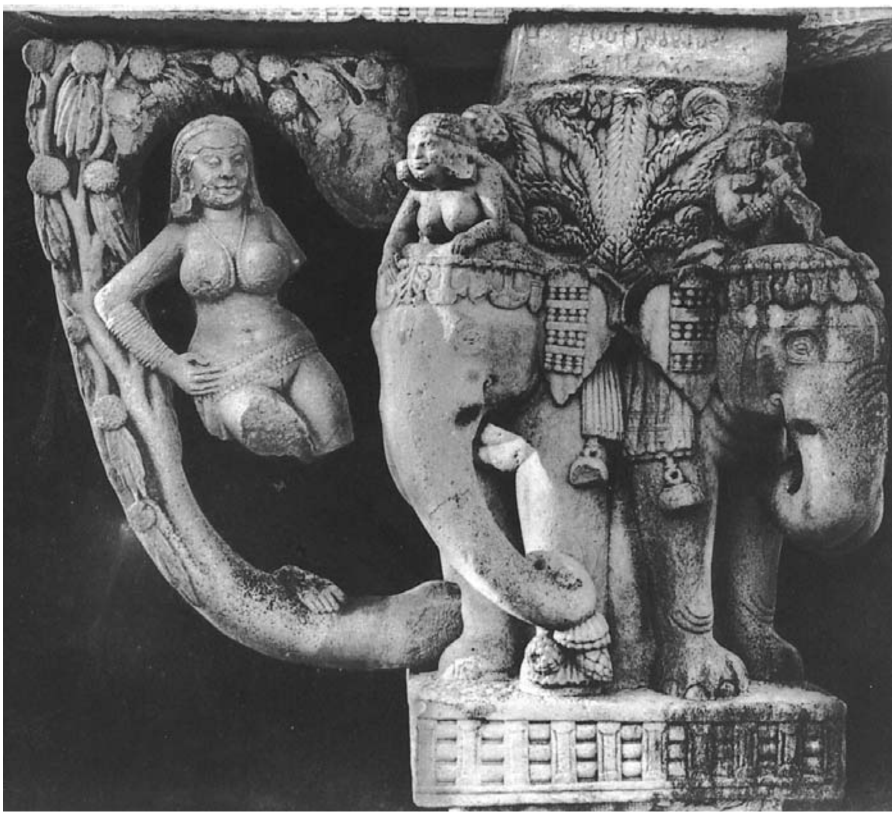


Fig. 15. Iconic signs of *yakṣiṇī* and elephants. Sāñcī *stūpa* 1, late 1st century BC or early 1st century AD. From: J Marshall, A Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñcī*. Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1940. Vol. 2, pl. 25.

that makes the sign easily interpretable as an indexical sign pointing to the Buddha in some event in his life. Indexical signs have been used in several different ways. We will see here a couple of slightly different ways to depict an indexical sign. The most common indexical sign is when a sign points to an event connected to that sign. The *bodhivr̥kṣa* is, for example, connected with the enlightenment. However, there are several narrative reliefs on the gateways without a natural connection between the *bodhivr̥kṣa* and the event. The *bodhivr̥kṣa* has in several reliefs lost its narrative context.

Firstly, there is a relief on the west pillar of the northern gateway, commonly interpreted as the offering to the Buddha made by a monkey just outside Vaiśāli (fig. 16). To the left there is a *bodhivr̥kṣa* with garlands. In front of the tree is an *āsana* which looks more like an altar than a throne or a seat. Near the *āsana* are two monkeys, or rather a reduplication of one and the same monkey. The nearest holds a bowl with its hands and the other raises its empty



Fig. 16. Indexical sign pointing to the event when a monkey offered honey to the Buddha. Sāñcī *stūpa* 1, late 1st century BC or early 1st century AD.

hands as in homage. In the front there are two women and a small child venerating the *āsana*. Four laypeople are standing in the back, watching the scene.

This relief can easily be interpreted as an indexical sign depicted in monoscenic or continuous narration representing the event when a monkey presented a bowl of honey to the Buddha. It is, however, also possible to interpret it otherwise. For example it may be interpreted as worship of a *bodhivṛkṣa* in *Vaiśāli*, where the two women and the child in the front represent the donors. The two monkeys would in that case have been placed there with the purpose of identifying the site. Regardless of which interpretation most closely reflects the intention of the artist or donor, the *bodhivṛkṣa* and the *āsana* together with the two monkeys, must have given rise to associations with the Buddha in the mind of the beholders.

Another relief on the same pillar depicts an *āsana* in front of the *bodhivṛkṣa* in the same way as the previous one. Three laypeople, two females and one male, are placed in front of the *āsana*. The male seems to be a king, as a royal umbrella is being held over him. A platform is depicted above the tree. This has been interpreted as the walking path of the Buddha and would then represent how he performed a miracle in front of his father king Śuddhodana, by

walking in the air. There are a few more platforms in other reliefs that have also been interpreted as the walking path of the Buddha. In one example the platform is placed in a river, probably representing a miracle when the Buddha walked on the water.

These two indexical signs consist of an *āsana* in front of a *bodhivṛkṣa*. A couple of important details must be observed. The *bodhivṛkṣas* in these two examples do not point to the enlightenment of the Buddha. Instead, they are connected with other events in his life. This may indicate that the *bodhivṛkṣa* is not closely connected with the enlightenment in the art of Sāñcī. It may already have lost its narrative context and be only pointing to the Buddha without narrative context. The *bodhivṛkṣa*, together with an *āsana*, has become an independent indexical sign for the Buddha, and may be used in different contexts.

The *āsana* looks more like an altar than something to sit upon. In these two examples nothing is on top of the *āsana*. There are, however, a few examples of reliefs at the gateways where something is placed on the *āsana*. In two reliefs some Buddhist symbols (lotus flowers, tridents) are placed on the *āsanas*. Most of the *āsanas* are however, completely empty. Another interesting detail is that of all the circa 30 reliefs at the gateways consisting of a *bodhivṛkṣa* and an *āsana*, not one depicts a pair of footprints in front of the *āsana*.

Another way to depict an indexical sign referring to the Buddha is seen in the relief commonly interpreted as representing the event when the Buddha leaves his palace (fig. 5). Whatever the intention of the artist, it is easy to interpret the riderless horses honoured with royal umbrellas as representing the Buddha when he leaves the palace. To the right there is a pair of foot prints under a royal umbrella. This may be an indexical sign for the enlightenment even if there is no *bodhivṛkṣa*. Notice that the foot print is not depicted in the ordinary Buddhist way. According to *Lakkhaṇa sutta* the Buddha had long fingers and toes.[33] This has usually been interpreted and shown iconographically as him having the fingers and toes all of the same length. This is not the case here. There is, just as it is related in *Lakkhana sutta*, only a wheel in the middle of the foot. No other signs are seen. Both the riderless horses and the footprint have thus been interpreted by western scholars as indexical signs referring to the Buddha, but there was probably a similar interpretation made by Buddhist beholders when Buddhism was still flourishing in India.

A third kind of relief has also been interpreted as an indexical sign pointing to the Buddha.[34] The whole east face of the east pillar of the north gateway (fig. 17) is covered with an *indrakhīla*, "Indras post".[35] It consists of a series of formalized lotus plants one above the other, with artificial brackets in the

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[33] [*Dīgha Nikāya*]. *Dialogues* ..., Part 3, p. 138.
[34] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñcī* ..., pp. 248–249.
[35] Rhys Davids, Stede, *Pali-English Dictionaly* ..., p. 121. For a discussion about the origin and development of the Indrakhīla see: Schalk, *Der Paritta-Dienst* ..., pp. 152–166, Tafel 1, 2, 9 and L de Silva, "Paritta. A Historical and Religious Study of the Buddhist Cermony for Peace and Prosperity in Sri Lanka", *Spolia Zeylanica* 36.1 (Colombo: National Museums of Sri Lanka, 1981), pp. 57–79.



Fig. 17. Indrakhīla. Sāñcī *stūpa* 1, late 1st century BC or early 1st century AD. From: J Marshall, A Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñcī*. Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1940. Vol. 2, pl. 37 a.

borders from which hang jewelled garlands and necklaces of lucky talismans betokening both worldly and spiritual riches.[36] At the top there is a trident and at the bottom a pair of footprints. I have some doubts about interpreting this as an indexical sign of the Buddha. Instead, I see the *indrakhīla* as a common

[36] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñcī* ..., p. 144.

Indian symbolic sign. At the same time it is a Buddhist symbolic sign as it is made in a Buddhist context with footprints and a trident. Corresponding reliefs on the right pillar of the northern gateway bear no distinctive Buddhist symbolic signs. It is important to notice that the footprints resemble the footprints discussed in the relief depicting the Buddha leaving the palace.

4.2.5.6 Summary of the Art on Stūpa *1*

The railing uprights on the stairway and upper pathway on *stūpa* 1 are of the same age or slightly earlier than the railings on *stūpa* 2, between approximately 150 and 100 BC. The carvings are, just like those on *stūpa* 2, from a common Indian tradition. There are no indexical signs pointing to the Buddha yet. Instead, there are iconic and symbolic signs of lotus flowers, animals, plants, humans and mythological creatures.

Sometime in the late 1st century BC or the early 1st century AD four gateways were added at the entrances. On them there are several indexical signs which seem to depict the presence of the Buddha without his physical appearance. Indexical signs have been used in several different ways. The *bodhivṛkṣa* has in several reliefs lost its narrative context. The *bodhivṛkṣa* no longer points only to the enlightenment of the Buddha. It was used to represent the Buddha connected to other events in his life. The *bodhivṛkṣa*, together with an *āsana*, has become an independent indexical sign for the Buddha, and may be used in different contexts. Another way to depict an indexical sign referring to the Buddha is to depict a riderless horse honoured with a royal umbrella. This was done expressely to depict the occasion when the Buddha left the palace.

4.2.6 *Stūpa* 3

Stūpa 3 is located close to *stūpa* 1, with a diameter of 15 metres and a height of more than eight meters. The *stūpa* was built in the 2nd century BC, not long after the reconstruction of *stūpa* 1. This is known because the same individual is recorded in inscriptions as donating gifts during the construction of the stairway balustrades of both.[37] The relics of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, two of the disciples of the Buddha, were found by Cunningham enshrined at the centre of the *stūpa*.[38]

The *stūpa* was surrounded by a railing (*vedikā*) of which the only remains are a few coping stones and some fragments of a few uprights. Altogether 35 uprights have survived. 5 uprights from the ground railing, 7 from the stairway, 16 from the drum and finally 7 uprights have survived from the *harmikā*.[39] The railings are decorated with full lotus flowers in the middle and half lotus flowers at the ends. Even the uprights on the *harmikā* are carved with lotus flowers, in contrast to *stūpa* 1 and 2. Two interesting corner up-

[37] Mitra, *Sanchi* ..., p. 42.
[38] Cunningham, *The Bhilsa Topes* ..., pp. 297–300, pl. 22.
[39] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñchī* ..., pl. 92.

rights[40] resemble those at *stūpa* 2. The decoration of the first is an iconic sign of a pillar crowned by lions and elephants. It resembles fig. 10 from *stūpa* 2, but there is no wheel on the top of the pillar. The second is an iconic sign of a *stūpa* with plants and mythological animals below.

On *stūpa* 3 there is only one gateway (*toraṇa*). It was built at the same time or shortly after the gateways at *stūpa* 1. The reliefs at the architraves and pillars consist of iconic and symbolic signs. No signs can be said to be indexical signs pointing to the Buddha because the signs do not appear in a narrative context.

Thus, the art work on *stūpa* 3 can be divided in two stages. The carvings on the railings resemble the art found on *stūpa* 2. The art on the gateway can approximately be dated to the same period as the gateways on *stūpa* 1. Its style resembles the art on the gateways of *stūpa* 1. No signs can be said to be indexical signs pointing to the Buddha, because the signs do not appear in a narrative context. Instead, there are a lot of iconic and symbolic signs with a clearly Buddhist substance.

4.2.7 Summary

The art that we are concerned with at *Sāñcī* can be divided into two stages. The first stage can be placed approximately between 150 and 100 BC. It consists of the art on the railings on *stūpa* 1, 2 and 3. The best preserved is the art on *stūpa* 2. The art in this stage was of a common Indian tradition, shared by Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike. It has no typically Buddhist features. No indexical signs referring to the Buddha can be found in this stage. Instead, the most common motif was the lotus flower, which was depicted hundreds of times on the railing uprights. Other common motifs are animals, plants and mythological creatures. A couple of uprights at the entrances on *stūpa* 2 must be specially observed (fig. 9, 10, 11). They have been interpreted as indexical signs referring to the Buddha and four of the events in his life. In contrast I, myself, am of the opinion that these carvings were only made as iconic or symbolic signs of sacred trees, wheels etc. The four great miracles in the life of the Buddha were not present in this early period of Buddhist art. They belong to a later period. It is, however, very likely that these signs were regarded as Buddhist signs by Buddhists at an early period. The signs on *stūpa* 2 have probably been interpreted as the four great miracles by Buddhists in later times.

The art from the second stage can be placed in the late 1st century BC or early 1st century AD and consists of the carvings at the four gateways at *stūpa* 1 and the gateway at *stūpa* 3. At this stage there was a rich and clearly distinguishable Buddhist art with many indexical signs referring to the Buddha in a narrative context. The indexical signs have been used in several different ways. The most common is to represent the Buddha with an *āsana* in front of a

[40] Ibid., pl. 93 g, i.

bodhivṛkṣa. The *āsana* in Sāñcī resembles an altar more than a throne or a seat and no footprints were added in front of the *āsana*. The *bodhivṛkṣa* does not any longer only point to the enlightenment of the Buddha. It has also been used to represent the Buddha connected to other events in his life. The *bodhivṛkṣa*, together with an *āsana*, has become an independent indexical sign for the Buddha, and may be used in different contexts. Another way to depict the Buddha was to leave an empty space below a royal umbrella. A third way was to depict a pair of foot prints. They must have been interpreted as indexical signs referring to the Buddha.

4.3 Andhradeśa

4.3.1 Introduction

The Great *stūpa* in Amarāvatī was visited by Colonel Mackenzie for the first time as early as in 1797.[41] It consisted at that time of a seven meter high mound. He did not return to the *stūpa* until 1816. It had meanwhile been pillaged of much of its stonework. During this second visit he stayed at the place for six months and started work recording and drawing the remains there.[42] When Sir Walter Elliot went to Amarāvatī in 1845 the *stūpa* mound was almost entirely gone. He started an excavation of the site but his work was never published.[43] Thereafter the *stūpa* was neglected until Robert Sewell in 1877 started excavations there again. The pieces Elliot collected were taken to Britain in 1859 and are today exhibited in the British Museum.[44] Unfortunately, only one quarter of the *stūpa* has been saved. Most of the preserved pieces are either in the Amarāvatī Museum, the Madras Museum or the British Museum, London.

The valley of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa had once been covered with Buddhist buildings. A local schoolteacher discovered it 1920. The site attracted the attention of scholars for the first time in 1926 and Longhurst undertook excavations there between 1927 and 1931. Between 1954 and 1960 the entire valley was carefully excavated, because today the whole valley is under the water of the Nāgārjunasāgar irrigation dam. A museum was built on an island in the reservoir to preserve the remains.[45]

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41 R Knox, *Amaravati. Buddhist Sculpture from the Great Stūpa* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), p. 17.
42 Knox, *Amarāvatī* ..., pp. 17–18.
43 Ibid., p. 18.
44 Loc. cit.
45 E R Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, Buddhist Tradition Series 25 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), pp. 1–2.

4.3.2 Buddhism in Andhradeśa

Little is known about the early history of the modern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, but it is nowadays established that Buddhism was introduced to the area as early as the time of Aśoka. Buddhism flourished in the area at least until the middle of the 4th century AD. In the 7th century when Xuanzang travelled in the area he describes the Buddhist establishments as mostly deserted and ruined.[46] The site of Amarāvatī, however, was in use until the 9th or 10th century AD.

The two most famous Buddhist sites in the area are Amarāvatī (its ancient name was Dhānyakaṭaka) and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, but there are hundreds of lesser known sites in the valley of the Krishna River and along the coast. Among these, the earliest phase of the *stūpas* in Bhaṭṭiprolu, Vaḍḍamānu, Garikapādu and a few others have together with Amarāvatī been proved by archaeological excavations to belong to the Mauryan times. Apart from the above sites there are also a few others that can be dated to the 2nd century BC.[47]

The wealth of the area came from trading activities with both the West and Southeast Asia. The flourishing commercial activities were dependent on the enormous Krishna River, which was easily navigable by large ships. It was the commercial activities that made it possible to build all the religious monuments in the area. The Great *stūpa* at Amarāvatī achieved its final form of 49 metres in diameter during the period of Śātavāhana. Dharaṇīkoṭa, not far from Amarāvatī, was a provincial capital of the Śātavāhana kingdom. At the time of the Ikṣvākus it shifted to Vijayapurī in the Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Valley.

4.3.3 The Dating of Art in Andhradeśa

4.3.3.1 Different Opinions Regarding the Age of Art in Amarāvatī

There have been controversies for a long time regarding the dating of the Buddhist site of Amarāvatī. However, it is possible to start the dating by dividing the history of Andhradeśa into three periods, pre-Śātavāhana, Śātavāhana and Ikṣvākus. The fall of Śātavāhana can be dated to approximately AD 225 and Ikṣvākus came to power at about the same time and established the capital at Vijayapurī in the Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Valley.[48] The end of the Ikṣvākus reign can be dated to AD 300 or 325.[49] The Śātavāhana or High Period, corresponding to the Middle and Later Periods of Douglas Barrett, continued until the middle of the 3rd century AD.

The dating of the early period of the Amarāvatī *stūpa* and the beginning of the Śātavāhana period is more debatable. The different opinions are derived

[46] Xuanzang, *Si-Yu-Ki, Buddhist Records* ..., vol 2, p. 221.
[47] I K Sarma, *Studies in Early Buddhist Monuments and Brāhmī Inscriptions of Andhradeśa* (Nagpur: Dattsons, 1988), pp. 11–12.
[48] Stone, *The Buddhist Art* ..., p. 5.
[49] Ibid., p. 7.

from different interpretations of the chronology of the Śātavāhana dynasty. The long chronology (circa 200 BC until AD 250) was proposed by C Sivaramamurti in 1942[50] and the short chronology (circa AD 125 until AD 300) by Douglas Barrett in 1954.[51] Sivaramamurti based his analysis mainly on interpretations of style and palaeography. Barrett on the other hand, used mainly the chronology of the Śātavāhana reign to establish the date of Amarāvatī.

In 1961 Philippe Stern and Mirelli Bénisti, using stylistic comparisons, proposed a "première période" beginning approximately at the same time as that of Bhārhut and Sāñcī.[52] The dating depends on the dating of Sāñcī and Bhārhut. This would be from late 2nd or early 1st century BC. Stern and Bénisti divided this first period into three parts, but they proposed no dating for the three parts. They dated five pieces of art (Pl. I–III) to the early part of the first period. The next part consists of slightly more evolved art related to the art of *stūpa* 1 and 3 at Sāñcī and the art of Mathurā. (Pl. IV–X). Theirs Pl. XI–XVI covers the end of this first period. In 1970 Vidya Dehejia published a study based mainly on palaeographic analysis. There she proposed a division of the early period at Amarāvatī into a post-Aśokan stage A, dated approximately between 90–60 BC and a stage B, between 60–25 BC.[53]

Despite the amount of archaeological evidence from the period before the 1st century AD that has been found, Douglas Barrett sticks to his conviction about the dating of Amarāvatī and repeats that no part of the great rail is earlier than the reign of Pulumāvi, that is AD 110–138 at the earliest. The date AD 130–158 is accepted by those, like himself, who believe that Nahapana lived in the Saka Era".[54] He seems to be the only one still believing that there was no early phase at Amarāvatī before the establishment of the Śātavāhanas.

The author of the British Museums Amarāvatī catalogue published in 1992, Robert Knox, has come to the opinion that the history of the Amarāvatī *stūpa* is a great deal older than was argued in the 1954 catalogue.[55] He believes that even the long chronology of Amarāvatī must be extended because of archaeological evidence. It is, according to him, likely that Buddhist activity at this site goes back to the 3rd century BC at least.[56]

4.3.3.2 The Chronology of the Śātavāhana Dynasty

The chronology of the late Śātavāhana kings has been subjected to many interpretations. At the time of Śātakarṇi I the capital was located on the banks of the

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[50] C Sivaramamurti, *Amaravati Sculptures in the Madras Government Museum*. Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, New Series, General Selection, 4 (Madras: Government Press, 1942), pp. 8–14, 26–32.
[51] D Barrett, *Sculptures from Amaravati in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1954), pp. 13–18.
[52] P Stern, M Bénisti, *Évolution du style Indien d'Amarāvatī*. Recherches et Documents d'Art et d'Archéologie, T 7 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), pp. 72–73, pl. I–XV.
[53] V Dehejia, "Early Activity at Amaravati", *Archives of Asian Art* 23 (1969–70), pp. 41–47.
[54] D Barrett, "Style and Palaeography at Amarāvatī", *Oriental Art* 32.2 (1990), p. 80.
[55] Knox, *Amaravati* ..., p. 13.
[56] Loc. cit.

Godavari River in what is now the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. The Śātavāhanas were driven away from the upper Godavari by the Śakas who were pushed to the south by Kuṣāṇas.[57] Puḷumāvi was the first Śātavāhana ruler of Andhradeśa.[58] The date of his succession gives a date for the beginning of the reconstruction of the Great *Stūpa.* The *Purāṇas* contain two divergent traditions of the chronology of the Śātavāhanas. A long chronology mentioning thirty kings who ruled for about 450 years and a short chronology mentioning seventeen or nineteen kings who ruled for about 300 years. The date of the rise of the Śātavāhanas according to the short chronology was about 30 BC. According to the long chronology it was in the 1st half of the 2nd century BC.[59]

It is not possible to definitely settle the controversy of the Śātavāhana chronology in this study. The short chronology must be considered the most likely, as already indicated in the chapter about Sāñcī. The dating of the High Period of the Great *Stūpa*, which belongs to the Śātavāhana period, will therefore in this study follow Knox and be considered as having lasted between the 2nd and the 3rd century AD.[60] One important piece of evidence for the establishment of the beginning of the Śātavāhana period is a coin belonging to the reign of Puḷumāvi, discovered at the 1973–74 excavations at Amarāvatī. This coin, together with a large number of other Śātavāhana coins, belongs to Period III (circa 1st–2nd century AD) according to the documentation from the excavation.[61] The coins were not found in the earliest sub-period of Period III, but they indicate that the Śātavāhana period started in the early 2nd or even late 1st century AD.

4.3.3.3 The Date of the Early Amarāvatī

The dating of the pre-Śātavāhana period is not solved by the Śātavāhana chronology. Barrett used the short chronology of Śātavāhana in order to establish the beginning of Buddhist activities in Andhradeśa. He may be right when he says that no evidence of the presence of the Śātavāhanas before the 2nd century AD has yet been discovered at Andhradeśa.[62] This is, however, not to say that there were no Buddhists or that no *stūpa* was built before the Śātavāhanas, as Barrett seems to believe. He does not accept the existence of a pre-Śātavāhana period and pre-Śātavāhana Buddhist buildings, but has only one argument for the origin of the Amarāvatī *stūpa* in the reign of the Śātavāhanas. He is of the opinion that before the 1st century AD there was neither the social organisation nor the economic wealth to erect a series of monuments in the Andhradeśa.[63] He does not present any further arguments for his view. It is,

[57] H Kulke, D Rothermund, *A History of India* (London: Routledge, 1986), pp. 101–102.
[58] Knox, *Amaravati* ..., p. 13.
[59] Barrett, *Sculptures* ..., pp. 13–14.
[60] Knox, *Amaravati* ..., pp. 13–14.
[61] "Excavation at Amaravati, District Guntur", *Indian Archaeology 1973–74, a Review* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1979), p. 5, pl. 1.
[62] Barrett, *Sculptures* ..., p. 12.
[63] Ibid., p. 40.

however, possible to turn his arguments the other way round and suggest that if there were Buddhist monuments in pre-Śātavāhana time in Andhradeśa, there must have been a social organisation and the economic wealth to build these monuments.

Fragments of a pillar edict inscribed on a local quartzite stone in Brāhmī characters have been found in Amarāvatī.[64] They are now housed in the Amarāvatī Museum.[65] Already in 1897 Burgess observed the existence of granite uprights in Amarāvatī. He found five massive blocks of carefully polished brown granite, which had at one time been uprights of the outer rail. Lighter crossbars than those used elsewhere were found near these uprights. He was inclined to think they were very early.[66] In an excavation carried out in 1973–74 under the direction of I K Sarma, a similar granite upright was discovered. It was found in a stratigraphic context datable to the 3rd century BC and bears a typical Mauryan polish.[67] Therefore, there is no reason to deny the existence of a small *stūpa* from the 2nd or even 3rd century BC in Amarāvatī.

4.3.3.4 Summary

The discoveries of various sculptured and inscribed fragments in Amarāvatī, Bhaṭṭiprolu and other places, lead us to postulate the existence of at least a couple of small *stūpas* during the period we could call pre-Śātavāhana. This period can probably be traced back as early as the 3rd century BC and it may have lasted until late 1st century AD. We can also divide this period into early and late pre-Śātavāhana, with the division at the beginning of the 2nd century BC. The Śātavāhana or High Period lasted from the beginning of the 2nd century until the middle of the 3rd century AD and the period of the Ikṣvākus lasted from approximately 250 until 300 or 325 AD.

4.3.4 Pre-Śātavāhana Period

4.3.4.1 Introduction

This period has sometimes been called post-Aśokan, but I prefer the term pre-Śātavāhana. It is a long period and represents a progressive stylistic evolution from probably the 3rd century BC until the late 1st century AD when the classic Amarāvatī style of the High Period was formed. Remains of *stūpas* from this period have been found at Amarāvatī, Bhaṭṭiprolu and Jaggayyapeṭa, but also from a couple of other places.

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[64] "Excavation at Amaravati ...", p. 4. I K Sarma, "Early Sculptures and Epigraphs from South-East India. New Evidence from Amarāvatī", *Indian Epigraphy, Its Bearing on the History of Art.* Edited by F M Asher and G S Gai (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1985), p. 16, pl. 12.
[65] H Sarkar, S P Nainar, *Amaravati*, 3rd Ed. (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1992), pp. 12, 42.
[66] J Burgess, *The Buddhist Stupa of Amaravati and Jaggayyapeta* (London: Trübner & Co., 1887), pp. 22–23.
[67] "Excavation at Amaravati ...", p. 4.



Fig. 18. Iconic sign of *bodhivṛkṣa* and *stūpa.* Amarāvatī *stūpa*, cross-bar, 2nd century BC. Amarāvatī Museum.

4.3.4.2 Granite Railing and Limestone Crossbar

A carved granite upright has been found at the eastern side of the Amarāvatī *stūpa.* It has three lenticular mortises and an inscription in 3rd century characters. It bears a symbolic sign of a trident.[68] An early carved limestone crossbar (fig. 18) has also been found in Amarāvatī. It has been dated to around the 3rd century BC because of the style of its Brāhmī inscription.[69] It is depicted with an iconic sign of a *stūpa* with a plain undecorated railing and a sacred tree enclosed by a similar railing. Flags and garlands are hanging both in the tree and on the *stūpa.* Small lights can be seen on the railing around the sacred tree. The form is very simple and it is created in the lowest relief.[70] This sign may give us a clue to the way sacred trees and *stūpas* were decorated at this early time. It has been suggested that the crossbar was fitted to the earliest granite railing.[71]

4.3.4.3 An Octagonal Pillar

The pillar seen in fig. 19 has been dated as belonging to the first part of the first period (approximately late 2nd century BC) by Stern and Bénisti[72] and the

[68] Sarma, "Early Sculptures and Epigraphs ...", p. 17, pl. 16.
[69] Knox, *Amaravati* ..., p. 32.
[70] Loc. cit.
[71] Ibid., p. 12.
[72] Stern, Bénisti, *Évolution du Style* ..., p. 72–73, pl. 1.



Fig. 19. Iconic sign of *bodhivr̥kṣa*. Amarāvatī *stūpa*, late 2nd or early 1st century BC. British Museum, London. Photo: British Museum. See also fig. 109 in R Knox, *Amaravati. Buddhist Sculpture from the Great Stūpa*. London: British Museum Press, 1992.

1st century BC by Knox.[73] The height of the pillar is 255 cm and its diameter is nearly 39 cm. The pillar is carved on four of the eight faces in low relief. It is decorated in the following way. The first face consists of a Mauryan pillar with a lion capital. The pillar stands in an "urn of plenty" (*pūrṇaghaṭa*). The pillars found at Vaiśali, Louriya-Nandangarh and Rāmpūrva all had a single lion seated on the capital of the pillar. An iconic sign of a Mauryan pillar is also depicted on the next side. This pillar is surrounded by a square railing and the capital consists of a thousand-spoked wheel resting on a pair of seated elephants. At the bottom of the third face is a "pot-bellied yakṣa"[74] blowing lotus flowers from a trumpet. At the top of this face is an iconic sign of a *bodhivr̥kṣa* surrounded by a circular railing (fig. 19). The leaves are very delicately cut and a garland hangs in the tree. A pair of lotus flowers also flank the tree. The bottom of the last face consists of an "urn of plenty" (*pūrṇaghaṭa*) with lotus flowers. At the top there is an iconic sign of a *stūpa* with a high drum surrounded by a railing. The drum is decorated with a band or garlands and swags.

[73] Knox, *Amaravati* ..., pp. 193–194, pl. 109.
[74] Ibid., p. 194.

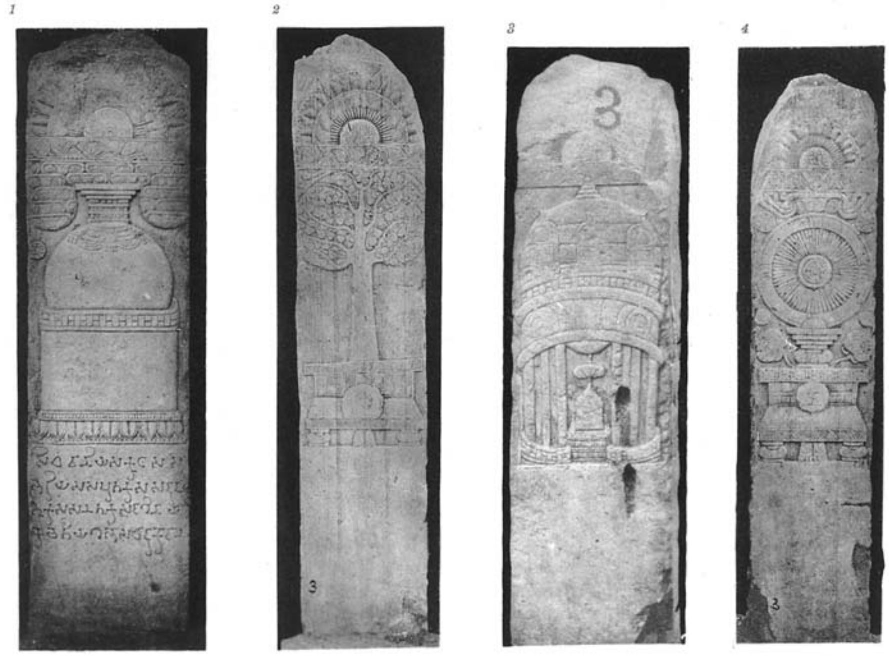


Fig. 20. Four iconic signs on a pillar. *Stūpa*, *bodhivṛkṣa*, circular temple and a wheel. Amarāvatī *stūpa*, 2nd or 1st century BC. From: J Burgess, *The Buddhist stūpas of Amaravati and Jaggayyapeta*. London: Trübner & Co., 1887. Pl. XLV, 1-4.

The subjects on this pillar correspond closely to the carvings on the uprights at the four entrances at Sāñcī *stūpa* 2. As the date of the pillar can be estimated to late 2nd or early 1st century BC it definitely belongs to the time between the first and second stages at Sāñcī. It is also interesting to notice that it has been suggested that even the carvings on this pillar represent the four great events in the life of the Buddha.[75] The enlightenment, the first sermon and the *parinirvāṇa* are naturally represented by the tree, the wheel and the *stūpa*. Why a *pūrṇaghaṭa* and a lion pillar should represent the birth of the Buddha is more far-fetched. However, this interpretation of the four faces of the pillar is in my view an over-interpretation which must be due to the fact that Barrett has been inspired by later Buddhist art. Thus, I have to repeat what I already postulated about Sāñcī *stūpa* 2. This art is of a common Indian tradition shared by Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike. Later we will see how these signs really developed and became indexical signs of the Buddha. At this stage I do not see them as anything but iconic signs of pillars, sacred trees, and *stūpas* or as iconic signs of sacred places.

[75] Barrett, *Sculptures from ...*, p. 65.

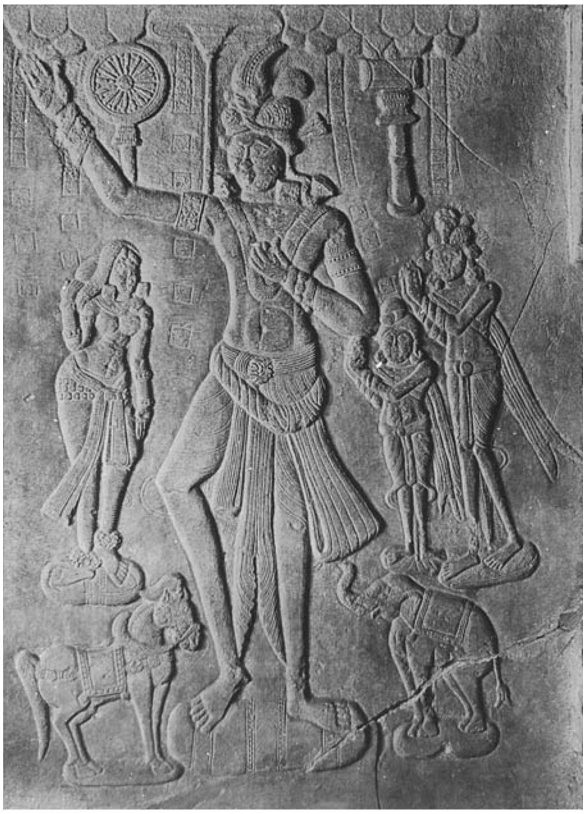


Fig. 21. Symbolic sign of *Cakravarti*. Jaggayyapeṭa *stūpa*, 2nd or 1st century BC. Madras Museum. Photo: K P Rao.

4.3.4.4 Reliefs of a Stiff and Angular Style

A couple of reliefs of a stiff and angular style with flat human bodies have been found both at Jaggayyapeṭa and Amarāvatī. They belong probably to the 1st century BC. A pillar carved on all four faces was found at the south gate of Amarāvatī *stūpa* (fig. 20). The four faces depict a *stūpa*, a *bodhivṛkṣa*, a circular temple and a wheel. In front of the *bodhivṛkṣa* and the wheel there is an *āsana* and a pair of footprints (*buddhapāda*). In the middle of the temple there is a relic casket. All four faces are depicted in a stiff and angular style and no humans can be seen.[76]

A relief possibly representing a *cakravartin*, a wheel-turner, was found at Jaggayyapeṭa and is a beautiful representative of this style (fig. 21). A couple of reliefs belonging to the same style and depicting worship in front of symbolic signs have also been found at both Amarāvatī and Jaggayyapeṭa. One of these is now in the Amarāvatī Museum (fig. 22) and was probably found at Amarāvatī *stūpa*. A similar relief has been found in Jaggayyapeṭa.

A drum slab at the British Museum (124 x 86 x 12, 5 cm) consists of one face of a relief that is usually interpreted as an indexical sign pointing to the

[76] Burgess, *The Buddhist Stupa ...*, pp. 86–87, pl. 45, 1–4.

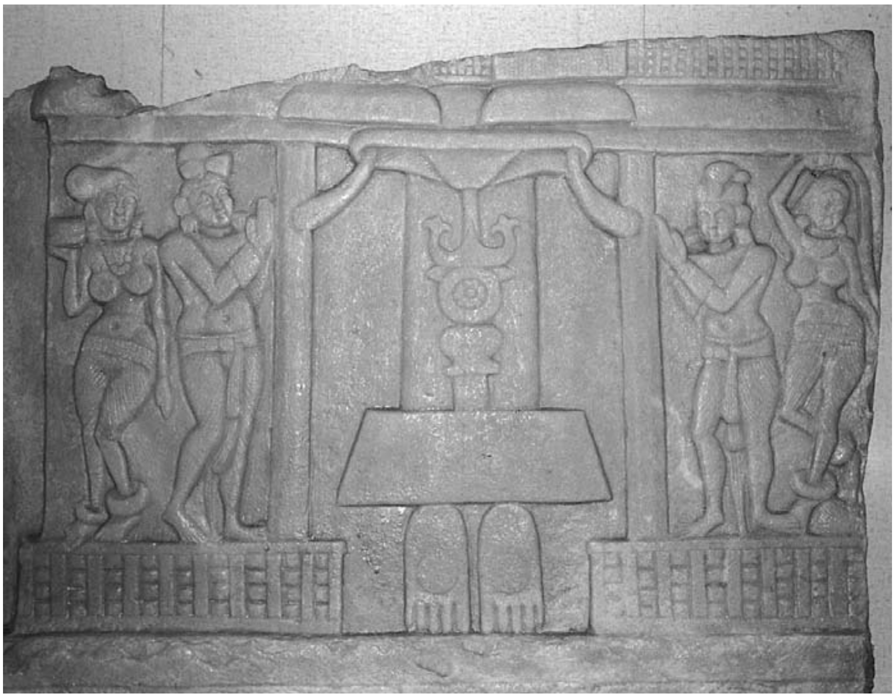


Fig. 22. Iconic sign of Buddhist worship. Trident, wheel or lotus flower, *āsana* and *buddhapāda* under an umbrella. Amarāvatī *stūpa*, 2nd or 1st century BC. Amarāvatī Museum.

Buddha and his enlightenment (fig. 23). The other face consists of an elaborately and tightly decorated *stūpa* of the Śātavāhana period. A standing Buddha is depicted at the gate of the *stūpa* on the second face. There is no doubt that the two sides were carved at different times and that the slab has been re-used. It is only the earliest face that concerns us so far.

It has been suggested that the enlightenment scene belongs to the 1st century BC and the *stūpa* scene to the 3rd century AD.[77] The original slab with the enlightenment scene must have been taken away and re-used on the reverse side. The reason may have been a decision to follow an overall plan to decorate the drum only with replicas of the *stūpa* itself.[78] Therefore, it is impossible to believe that this slab belongs to an earlier lesser *stūpa*. It must belong to the earliest phase of the great *stūpa* itself, at the time when the *stūpa* began to be decorated on the drum and dome. This raises the question whether the Amarāvatī *stūpa* was enlarged and reconstructed to its full size at the time of the Śātavāhanas or earlier. Knox believes that this slab antedates the great reconstruction of the *stūpa*.[79] If this is the case, the pre-Śātavāhana *stūpa* must also

[77] Knox, *Amaravati* ..., pp. 119, 139.
[78] Deheija, *Discourse in Early* ..., p. 152.
[79] Knox, *Amaravati* ..., p. 32.



Fig. 23. Iconic sign of worship in front of *bodhivṛkṣa*, *āsana* and *buddhapāda*. Amarāvatī *stūpa*, late 1st century BC or early 1st century AD. British Museum, London. Photo: British Museum.

have been decorated on the dome or on the drum. Its style resembles fig. 21 and 22 somewhat, but it seems to be a little more elaborate in style. This makes it hard to believe that it can be dated earlier than to the late 1st century BC. It definitely belongs to late pre-Śātavāhana time, late 1st century BC or 1st century AD, approximately the same time as the second period at Sāñcī. The suggestion by Barrett that this narrative drum slab has been attached to the face of the *āyaka* platform[80] does not indicate an earlier date.

The relief shows a *bodhivṛkṣa* enclosed by a railing. An *āsana* is placed in front of the tree. At the base of the *āsana* it is possible to discern a stone slab engraved with a *buddhapāda* slab decorated with wheels. The *āsana* is not made as a seat. It looks more like an altar to put flowers upon. Five worshippers surround the *āsana* and a pair of divine beings hover above the tree. The low relief with wide and flat faces is in stark contrast to the elaborate, naturalistic decoration of the Śātavāhana period. Because of the shape of the *āsana* I prefer not to interpret this relief as an indexical sign pointing to the Buddha. We will see later that especially in Andhradeśa the *āsana* was later made as a seat to sit upon. Therefore, there are reasons for interpreting this relief as an iconic sign of worship at a sacred site.

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[80] Barrett, *Sculptures from ...*, p. 49.



Fig. 24. Buddhapāda slab. Amarāvatī *stūpa*, 2nd century BC. Madras Museum. Photo: K P Rao.

4.3.4.6 Buddhapāda

Two early squared stone slabs carved with footprints of the Buddha (*buddhapāda*) have been published by Knox.[81] One of them is carved with part of a dome slab depicting a large trident on the other side. On the surface of each print are a large thousand-spoked wheel, a trident, a lotus flower, several *svastikas* and hourglass shaped objects. The footprints are surrounded by an elaborate border consisting of lotus buds and flowers. Knox has proposed that they belong to the 1st century BC, which there is no reason to deny.

An even earlier *buddhapāda* slab from Amarāvatī may be seen in the Madras Museum (fig. 24). Here the two prints are carved in a more elongated form and with some distance between them. Only four signs, *triśūla*, *śrīvatsa*, *cakra* and *svastika,* can be seen on the prints. Two devotees are shown on either side of the prints with hand joined in adoration. This slab must be one of the earliest ever found and belongs in all probability to the 2nd century BC.[82] A development of *buddhapāda* slabs can be seen from shallow and simple ornamentation with only a few signs to deep and complex ornamentation with more and more signs engraved on the footprints.[83] The earliest footprints were

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[81] Knox, *Amaravati* ..., pl. 120, 121. Barrett, *Sculptures from* ..., pl. 47.

[82] K P Rao, *Buddhapada in the Early Art of Andhradesa*. Unpublished Manuscript presented at the International Seminar on Buddhism in Andhradesa, Conducted by the Birla Archaeological and Cultural Research Institute, Hyderabad, December 1997, pp. 6–7.

[83] Rao, *Buddhapada in the Early* ..., pp. 6–7. P Schalk, "The Oldest Buddhist Artefacts Discovered in Tamiḻakam". *'Being Religious and Living through the Eyes'. Studies in Religious Iconography and Iconology. A Celebratory Publication in Honour of Professor Jan Bergman*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Historia Religionum 14. Edited by Peter Schalk (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1998), p. 323.



Fig. 25. Iconic signs of Buddhist worship. Amarāvatī *stūpa*, pillar 2nd century BC. Amarāvatī Museum. From: A Ghosh, H Sarkar, "Beginnings of Sculptural Art in South-East Asia. A Stele from Amaravati". *Ancient India.* Vol. 20/21 (1964–1965). Pl. XL.

carved separately (on the same slab) with some distance between the two prints. The footprints of the earlier period are more elongated than the later ones. In later periods, when more signs were to be incorporated, the footprints were made wider.[84]

4.3.4.7 An Early Carved Pillar

In the archaeological excavations carried out in 1958–59 at the Amarāvatī *stūpa* a squared pillar was discovered. It has been suggested that the pillar belongs to the 2nd century BC. The pillar is badly damaged and one of its sculptured faces is missing. The three extant faces depict Buddhist scenes with enclosed inscriptions. The most interesting face, the first face according to Ghosh and Sarkar, has been interpreted as consisting of six indexical signs pointing to the last three months of the life of the Buddha (fig. 25).[85] However,

[84] Rao, *Buddhapada in the Early* ..., p. 6.
[85] A Ghosh, H Sarkar, "Beginnings of Sculptural Art in South-East India. A Stele from Amaravati", *Ancient India* 20/21 (1964–65), pp. 169–173. Sarma, "Early Sculptures and Epigraphs ...", p. 19.

I am not convinced that the carvings really consist of indexical signs. Instead, I prefer to see it as depicting worship at six sites in the neighbourhood of Vaiśālī and Kuśīnagara. It is even possible to interpret it as a depiction of a pilgrimage made to places connected with the last three month of the life of the Buddha.

The first scene in the lower part of the left corner seems to have nothing at all to do with the Buddha. According to the inscription on the carvings it depicts the Bahuputra-caitya. Several commentaries describe Bahuputra-cetiya as a pre-Buddhist shrine just outside Vaiśālī. Peoples used to come there and pray for sons to the spirit in the *nigrodha* tree.[86] We can see one of the devotees holding a child towards the tree. The second scene depicts worship in front of a *buddhapāda* slab in Cāpāla-catiya, the place where the Buddha met Māra just outside Vaiśālī. I do not believe, as Gosh and Sarkar do, that the worshipper seen in the carving is the Māra himself. They have probably been misled by later Buddhist aniconic art. Cāpāla was once the residence of *yakṣa* Cāpāla, but, according to the *Udāna* commentary, a *vihāra* was later erected there for the use of the Buddha.[87]

Also depicted on the same face are the site of Kūṭāgārasālā, a hall near Vaiśālī where the Buddha stayed several times during his lifetime and the site were the Buddha gazed at Vaiśālī for the last time. In Pāvā the Buddha was invited to a meal by the smith Cunda, which prove to be his last. A spot beneath a tree, a river and a bowl is seen in the carvings. This represents the place were the Buddha quenched his thirst after he was poisoned. After the death of the Buddha a *stūpa* was, according to *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (II:167), erected in Pāvā to enclose his relics. Finally, the upper corner on the right side is lacking, but the sixth site depicted there was probably the *stūpa* at Kuśīnagara where the Buddha entered *parinirvāṇa*. Thus, instead of interpreting this face as consisting of indexical signs pointing to the Buddha, they should be interpreted as iconic signs pointing to several sacred sites in the neighbourhood of Vaiśālī and Kuśinagara. The face may also be interpreted as depicting pilgrimages to several sacred sites connected with the last days and death of the Buddha.

The second face gives a few scenes from Śrāvastī, including the familiar scene of the purchase of the Jetavana park by a wealthy merchant, Anāthapiṇḍika. As in Bhārhut, it is possible to recognise a cart loaded with coins and two people busy spreading the coins. The third face seems to represent a scene at Dhānyakaṭaka, which is the ancient name of Amarāvatī.

4.3.4.8 Miscellaneous Carvings

A couple of old railing copings carved on only one face have been found. On one of these a series of dwarfs with flat broad faces, thick lips and staring eyes

[86] G P Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, Vol. 2, (London: Pali Text Society, 1974), p. 273.
[87] Malalasekera, *Dictionary* ..., Vol. 1, p. 863.

hold a thick garland.[88] These dwarfs seem identical to the dwarf at the octagonal pillar and the dwarf at one corner of a *buddhapāda*, both mentioned earlier. All these pieces cannot be of a later date than the 1st century BC. Decorations in pre-Śātavāhana art are often in the form of garlands, plants and lotus flowers just as we have seen at Sāñcī. Just as in Sāñcī different kinds of mythological creatures can be found depicted on *stūpas* in Andhradeśa. Several fragments now in the Madras Museum, depict *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇīs* from this pre-Śātavāhana period. Short inscriptions on them makes it possible to identify particular *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇīs* and on palaeographic grounds they can be dated to late 2nd or early 1st century BC.[89]

4.3.4.9 Summary of Art in the Pre-Śātavāhana Period

There have not yet been any indexical signs pointing to the Buddha discovered from the pre-Śātavāhana period. Instead, a couple of iconic signs have been discovered from the earliest time. An early crossbar (fig. 18) depicts a *bodhivṛkṣa* and a *stūpa*. In addition, an octagonal pillar (fig. 19) depicts a *bodhivṛkṣa*, a wheel-pillar and a *stūpa*. They both probably belong to the late 2nd or early 1st century BC. There is no doubt about these signs. They can not be interpreted as indexical signs. Stone slabs (fig. 24) with *buddhapādas* from the 2nd century BC have been discovered. It is such *buddhapāda* slabs lying in front of an *āsana* that served as models for later indexical signs. In fig. 23 we see a relief depicting an *āsana* and a *buddhapāda* slab in front of a *bodhivṛkṣa*. This relief from the 1st century BC has been interpreted as an indexical sign of the Buddha. I question this interpretation. Instead, I believe that it should be interpreted as an iconic sign of worship in front of a *bodhivṛkṣa*, an *āsana* and a *buddhapāda*. The same may be said about the carvings (fig. 25) interpreted as depicting the three last months in the life of the Buddha. It may be worship at these places that is the important thing here.

4.3.5 The Śātavāhana Period

4.3.5.1 The Great Amarāvatī Stūpa

The architecture of the Amarāvatī *stūpa* is similar in most respects to other *stūpas* in the Indian continent. There are, however, a couple of unique features that distinguish *stūpas* from Andhradeśa from those from other areas.[90] The first and most apparent is that the drum and the dome were elaborately decorated on their surfaces with slabs and pilasters. This is uncommon in other places in Buddhist India, with the exception of Gandhāra. Another difference is that most probably there was no raised pathway round the dome unlike at *stūpas* from other areas. A platform (*āyaka*) with a group of five pillars was

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[88] Knox, *Amaravati* ..., pl. 31.
[89] A Ray, *Life and Art of Early Andhradesa* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1983), p. 118, pl. 16–19.
[90] There is a reconstruction of the Amarāvatī *stūpa* in Knox, *Amaravati* ..., p. 24.



Fig. 26. Three indexical signs pointing to the Buddha. *Bodhivṛkṣa*, *cakrastambha* and *stūpa*. Amarāvatī *stūpa*, dome slab, 1st or 2nd century AD. Amarāvatī Museum.

constructed inside the entrances at each of the cardinal points. This is something unique to the *stūpas* in Andhradeśa.

4.3.5.2 The Dome

The decoration of the lower area of the dome consisted of a range of large rectangular, three-panel slabs. These slabs are often engraved with indexical signs pointing to the Buddha. In fig. 26 we see three of the main events in the life of the Buddha represented with a *bodhivṛkṣa*, a wheel and a *stūpa*. It is interesting to notice that in this period the *āsana* depicted in front of the *bodhivṛkṣa* and the wheel looks more like a chair or even a throne. The *bodhivṛkṣa*, the wheel and the *stūpa* occur so often and in such a way that we can speak of



Fig. 27. Three indexical signs pointing to the Buddha. Two *cakrastambhas* and one flaming pillar. Amarāvatī *stūpa*, drum slab, 1st or 2nd century AD. Amarāvatī Museum.

a standardized decoration. Likewise, sometimes one of these signs has been replaced by another indexical sign. We know from the writing of James Fergusson that the lowest relief on a dome slab now missing was replaced by a riderless horse coming out of a gate. The horse was followed by a servant holding an umbrella over it. This indexical sign points to the Buddha when he was leaving the palace.

4.3.5.3 The Drum

The lower area of the drum was decorated with a series of slabs bearing *stūpa* reliefs separated by a series of narrow pilasters. Indexical signs of the Buddha are depicted on several of them. We can on one slab (fig. 27) see three indexical signs. The one in the middle depicts a flaming pillar. The other two have a wheel at the top of a pillar.

So far we have seen four events in the life of the Buddha depicted on the dome and the drum. Another event can be seen depicted on a drum frieze. The enlightenment, the first sermon and the *parinirvāṇa* are as usual represented by a *bodhivṛkṣa*, a wheel and a *stūpa*. To the left there is an unusual relief probably representing water indicated by wavy lines. The water may be interpreted as representing lake Anotatta, one of the seven great lakes of Himavā. It is told



Fig. 28. Indexical sign pointing to the event when Rāhula was presented before his father, the Buddha. Amarāvatī *stūpa*, railing crossbar, 1st or 2nd century AD. Amarāvatī Museum.

that queen Māyā on the day she became pregnant dreamt that she had been taken to the lake.[91] The water in which she bathed may therefore represent the nativity of the Buddha.

4.3.5.4 Pillars, Crossbars and Copings on the Railing

The railing at the Great *stūpa* in Amarāvatī is the largest and most richly decorated of all known. The outer face of the railing is carved mostly with purely decorative motifs, such as lotus flowers in various shapes. The inner face of the railing contains more complex narrative carvings. Indexical signs pointing to the Buddha in different events from his life are commonly depicted. It is as usual the enlightenment, the first sermon and his *parinirvāṇa* that are most frequently depicted. A few other events also occur occasionally.

Indexical signs have in Amarāvatī also been used in similar ways as on the gateway pillars at Sāñcī (fig. 16). A railing crossbar (fig. 28) is depicted in a way that makes us think about the story of the presentation of Rāhula before his father, the Buddha. The Buddha is here as usual represented by an empty *āsana*. In front of the *āsana* is a *buddhapāda* and on the back of the *āsana* a flaming pillar is surmounted by a trident. A man is seen presenting a young boy to the *āsana*. It is important here to notice that the indexical sign in this relief has been used to illustrate an uncommon event. Just as in the second stage at *Sāñcī*, it is no longer only the three main events that are presented with indexical signs.

[91] Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli* ..., Vol. 1, pp. 96–99.

4.3.5.5 Iconic Signs of the Buddha

In the late 2nd century AD the indexical signs referring to the enlightenment of the Buddha were occasionally replaced by iconic signs of the same event. At least three certain examples of anthropomorphic images of the Buddha have been found from the late 2nd century AD.[92] Neither the first sermon nor the *parinirvāṇa* were at this time replaced by an anthropomorphic image. We have to wait until the 3rd century AD before all kinds of indexical signs were replaced by anthropomorphic images. However, at the same time as the Buddha was depicted in an anthropomorphic way, he was still represented through indexical signs.

4.3.5.6 Late Śātavāhana Period

This period is a continuation of the previous. Anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha were probably more common than indexical signs in this period. However, indexical signs were still in use. Art in this period became more and more detailed and the narrative images were crowded with humans. It was at the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century AD that standing Buddha images in the round started to be produced here in Andhradeśa. They have rather massive bodies and wear a thick togalike garment with one shoulder bare.

4.3.5.7 Summary of Art of the Śātavāhana Period

At this period a highly developed aniconic art form was created in Andhradeśa. Indexical signs of the *parinirvāṇa*, the first sermon and the enlightenment were made in highly stylized forms. At this time the Buddha also began to be depicted in an anthropomorphic way. However, he was still represented through indexical signs, sometimes even together with anthropomorphic representations.

4.3.6 The Ikṣvākus Period

In approximately 225 AD the Ikṣvākus dynasty came to power and established the capital at Vijayapurī in the Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Valley. The art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa has been considered as a stylistic bridge between the fully developed Amarāvatī style and the florescence of the Gupta style.[93] It was highly dependent upon the art of Amarāvatī. The decorative scheme of the Amarāvatī *stūpa* provided all the basic compositional formats used at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. The dome slabs were simply variants of the Amarāvatī type. However, in one major area Nāgārjunakoṇḍa produced a unique kind of art. There were no drum slabs at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. Instead, the *āyaka* platforms were lavishly decorated with panels.

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[92] Barrett, *Sculptures* ..., pp. 57–58.
[93] Stone, *The Buddhist Art* ..., p. 21.



Fig. 29. Iconic sign of the Buddha leaving the palace. Nāgārjunakoṇḍa *stūpa* 3, *āyaka* panel, 3rd century AD. Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Museum.



Fig. 30. Indexical sign pointing to the Buddha and the first sermon. Nāgārjunakoṇḍa *stūpa* 3, *āyaka* panel, 3rd century AD. Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Museum.

The use of anthropomorphic images had in this period replaced the indexical signs referring to the Buddha. However, indexical signs pointing to the Buddha were still in some use. It is interesting to notice that artists in a narrative *āyaka* panel consisting of several events in his life, chose to mix indexical signs and anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha (fig. 29, 30). The

birth, first sermon and *parinirvāṇa* are represented with indexical signs. In the great departure and the enlightenment the Buddha is represented anthropomorphically.

4.3.7 Summary

The art that we are concerned with in Andhradeśa can be divided into three stages. The pre-Śātavāhana stage represents a progressive stylistic evolution from the 3rd century BC until the late 1st century AD. The art at the beginning of this stage was of a common Indian tradition shared by Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike. This art with a lot of garlands, plants, lotus-flowers and mythical creatures, continued into the later stages. Important subjects, here as in Sāñcī, were iconic signs of pillars, wheels, sacred trees and *stūpas*.

Slabs with foot prints of the Buddha (*buddhapāda*) must have been created in the early pre-Śātavāhana period. They were probably placed in front of a *bodhivṛkṣa* or on the pathway round the *stūpa*. The footprints were later depicted together with the *bodhivṛkṣa* as iconic signs of a sacred site. One particularly interesting relief is from the late pre-Śātavāhana time and has been interpreted as an indexical sign referring to the enlightenment of the Buddha (fig. 23). Whether this relief was intended to represent the Buddha or worship at a sacred site, we will never know for sure. I prefer to interpret it as an iconic sign of worship because the shape of the *āsana*. The same may be true of an early carved pillar (fig. 25) which it has been suggested depicts the last three months in the life of the Buddha. Even this I prefer to interpret as depicting iconic signs of worship at a sacred site. It is difficult to interpret these two examples. I will admit that there may have been an evolution towards indexical signs already in this later pre-Śātavāhana time. These two examples may belong to a transitional stage. They may have been regarded both as iconic and indexical signs. They may have been interpreted differently by different beholders and the artists may also have had different interpretations from the beholders.

The Śātavāhana period started in the 2nd century AD. Indexical signs are richly represented in this period. Special dome slabs are often depicted with three indexical signs where a *bodhivṛkṣa*, a wheel and a *stūpa* refers to the enlightenment, the first sermon and *parinirvāṇa*. Sometimes one of these is replaced by a riderless horse referring to the event when the coming Buddha left the palace. These events are depicted again and again so that the narrative context is lost and instead they became symbolic signs referring to the Buddhist teachings. It is interesting to notice that the *āsana* is here depicted as a chair or even as a throne in comparison to those at Sāñcī which look more like altars. The first anthropomorphic image of the Buddha in Andhradeśa was created in this period. Indexical signs were replaced by anthropomorphic images of the Buddha. The Buddha was from the beginning depicted sitting in *abhayamudrā*. Free-standing Buddha images were also something new in this period.

In the Ikṣvākus period the use of anthropomorphic images had replaced the indexical signs referring to the Buddha. Artists continued to use indexical signs pointing to the Buddha but to a lesser extent. Intentionally artists mixed indexical signs and anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha.

4.4 Bhārhut

4.4.1 Introduction

In Bhārhut, 190 km south-west of modern Allahabad, Madhya Pradesh, the remains of a large *stūpa* were found in 1873 by Alexander Cunningham. The *stūpa* was already then largely destroyed.[94] The *stūpa* was located on a low eminence at the foot of a hill called Lal-pahar. Today, the site is totally desolate.[95] As with most Buddhist sites it was situated close to a trade route. The recovered portions of the railing and the only remaining gateway were removed to the Indian Museum, Calcutta, in 1875. Later findings from the Bhārhut railing have been placed in the Allahabad Museum and the National Museum in New Delhi. Some smaller pieces have even found their way to museums around the world.

The *stūpa* had a diameter of 20 metres and was built of large flat bricks. It was surrounded by a stone railing (*vedikā*), approximately three metres in height. Between the *stūpa* and the railing there was a three meter wide pathway for circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇāpatha*). The railing was built of dark red sandstone and divided into four segments by four gateways. Each segment consisted of sixteen uprights (*stambha*) which were connected by three sets of crossbars (*sūchi*) and topped with a coping (*uṣṇīṣa*). There were carvings both on the uprights, the crossbars and on the coping. The style of the railing as usual imitated wooden architecture. According to donative inscriptions the railing was the result of the joint effort of individuals, consisting both of laypeople, monks and nuns. Added to each of the four entrances was a short L-shaped railing with narrative entrance pillars. Seen from above the whole railing formed a large *svastika*. Around the beginning of the 1st century BC, four gateways were added to the entrances. Each gateway (*toraṇa*) consisted of two pillars over 4 meters in height. The two pillars were connected by three architraves. Just as in Sāñcī the gateways were imitations of the wooden portals of early Indian towns.

4.4.2 Dating

The *stūpa* was probably erected already in the time of Aśoka. It was originally built of bricks and was enlarged during the 2nd century BC. The stone railing

[94] Cunningham, *The Stūpa of Bharhut* ..., p. 4–5.
[95] Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments* ..., p. 93.

was probably also made during the 2nd century BC. The dating is based on palaeographical studies and on the style of the reliefs only. The exact dating is difficult to establish, but as we know that the east gateway cannot be dated later than early 1st century BC, the railing must have already been finished by then. An inscription on the eastern gateway assigns the work to Dhanabhūti in the reign of the Śuṅga dynasty.[96] Because the Śuṅga dynasty lasted until 72 BC, the gateway must have been built before that time.

According to Lüders, at the end of the 2nd century BC both the wooden railing and gateways had been replaced by those made of stone.[97] Susan Huntington, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the stone railing and gateways can not be older than 100-80 BC.[98] Judging from palaeographic evidence, N G Majumdar dates the inscriptions on the railing to about 125-100 BC. The reason for this decision is that earlier and later letters often occur side by side, just as on *stūpa* 2 in Sāñcī.[99]

Due to stylistic differences, however, the carvings on the Bhārhut railing must be regarded as later than those on the earliest phase (group A) on *stūpa* 2 in Sāñcī. The carvings at the Bhārhut railing are more deeply and lavishly carved than those at Sāñcī *stūpa* 2. However, with its stiff and cubic forms it can not be compared with the living art at the gateways at Sāñcī *stūpa* 1. According to a stylistic comparison made by Benjamin Rowland, the carvings on the railings at Bhārhut were probably not made earlier than 100 BC.[100]

Taken together, we can conclude that the carvings on the railings were made in the late 2nd or early 1st century BC, slightly later than the earliest carvings on Sāñcī *stūpa* 2. It is difficult to distinguish between older and later carvings on the railing. We can, however, assume that the railing was made over many years and that the narrative entrance pillars must have been the latest work. However, there is nothing that indicates that the gateway was built later than the entrance pillars. The carvings at the narrative entrance pillars belong with all probability to the early or middle 1st century BC.

4.4.3 The Carvings at Bhārhut *Stūpa*

4.4.3.1 Introduction

In order to discuss the carvings we can divide the railing in six parts. First there is (1) the railing uprights, (2) the crossbars and (3) the copings. At the four entrances there are (4) entrance pillars sculptured with *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇīs* of nearly human size. At the four L-shaped entrances there are (5) narrative pillars carved on the whole face, from top to bottom. Finally, there are four (6) decorated gateways at the entrances.

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96 *Bharhut Inscriptions* ..., pp. 11–12.
97 Ibid., p. xxxi.
98 Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India* ..., p. 65.
99 Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñcī* ..., pp. 270–271.
100 Rowland, *The Art and Architecture* ..., p. 88.

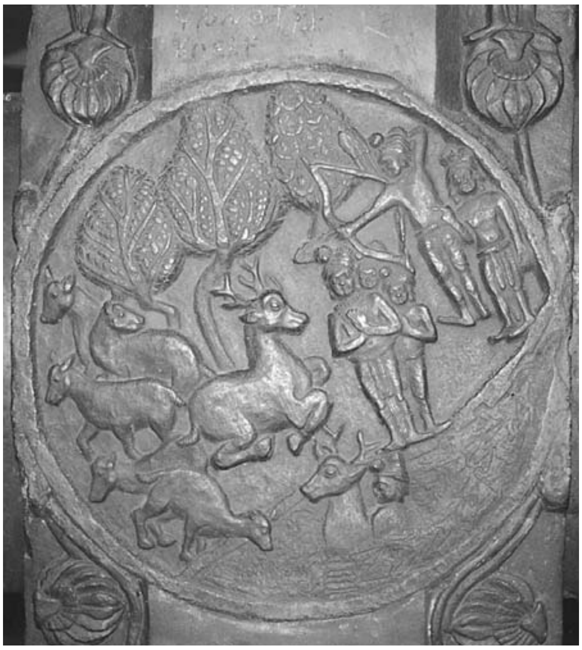


Fig. 31. Ruru jātaka. Bhārhut *stūpa*, medallion on railing uprights, late 2nd or early 1st century BC. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

The outer face of the railing is chiefly carved only with decorative motifs, mostly lotus flowers. It is the inner face of the railing that carried the more significant themes. One special feature is the many narrative reliefs that occur on the railing of the *stūpa*. Among them it is possible to find both *jātaka* tales and historic scenes. Of the approximately 90 narratives surviving at Bhārhut, 44 are clearly identified as *jātaka* tales.[101] Another feature in the art of Bhārhut is that the carvings often have descriptive inscriptions. It seems as if the themes were not yet easily understandable. The most popular ways to depict a story among the artist working at Bhārhut was to use monoscenic and synoptic narrations. A few examples of continuous and conflated narration can also be found among the existing materials.[102]

4.4.3.2 Railing Uprights, Crossbars and Copings

The first kinds of uprights are the railing uprights, except those at the four entrances. They are all decorated with half medallions at top and bottom, and a full medallion at the centre. Just as Sāñcī *stūpa* 2, most of the medallions are decorated with lotus flowers. Often the medallion consists of lotus flowers with an animal, mythological creature or a human face in the middle. Several *jātaka* stories, such as *Mahākapi jātaka*, *Ruru jātaka* (fig. 31)[103] etc., are also carved on the uprights. Śrī Lakṣmī occurs several times on the railing uprights.

[101] Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art ...*, pp. 97–98.
[102] Ibid., pp. 85–97.
[103] More known as the "deer jātaka".

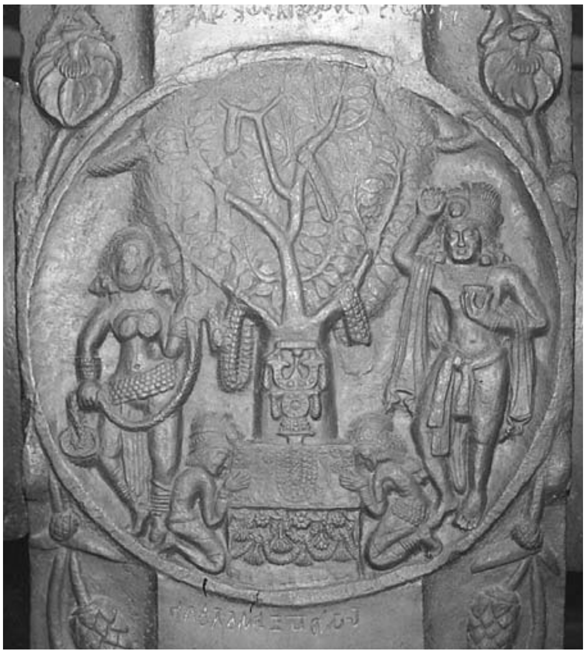


Fig. 32. Iconic sign of worship in front of the *bodhivṛkṣa* of Vesabhuṇā Buddha. Bhārhut *stūpa*, medallion on railing uprights, late 2nd or early 1st century BC. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

She is depicted, just as in Sāñcī, standing on a lotus flower and being bathed by two elephants. In one relief she is depicted sitting instead of standing. There is one medallion depicting queen Māyā sleeping and dreaming about a white elephant. This must be regarded as an iconic sign of the divine conception of the Buddha.

Worship in front of *bodhivṛkṣas* of previous Buddhas can be seen on five medallions (fig. 32). A platform (*āsana*) is depicted in front of each tree. There are no footprints on these medallions, but flowers and garlands are depicted lying on the *āsanas*. These five medallions have been interpreted as indexical signs referring to previous Buddhas. Barua is of the opinion that each *bodhivṛkṣa* symbolizes the entire life and personality of a Buddha.[104] Contrary to the carvings at Sāñcī and elsewhere, there are many carvings at Bhārhut with explanatory inscriptions. The inscription on one carving (fig. 32) reads, "bhagavato Vesabhuṇā bodhi sālo".[105] This may be translated as "the Sāla Bodhi tree of the holy Vesabhu (Viśvabhū)". The name of the species of the trees belonging to Vipaśyin, Kakutsandha, Konāgamana and Kāśyapa are not recorded in the inscriptions. Only the name of the *buddhas* are recorded on these four medallions. Yet, the conclusion must be that these five medallions are iconic signs of worship in front of five different *bodhivṛkṣas*. In my opinion, it is difficult to regard them as indexical signs pointing to the Buddhas.

[104] B Barua, *Bharhut*. Vol. 3 (Calcutta: Indian Research Institute, 1937), p. 48.
[105] *Bharhut Inscriptions* ..., p. 84.

There is a medallion on an upright that depicts a five-headed *nāga* sitting underneath a tree.[106] An *āsana* and a pair of footprints can be seen in front of the *nāga*. This relief has been interpreted as representing the *nāga*-king Mucalinda protecting the Buddha from a great storm. According to Buddhist texts the *nāga* winds his coil seven times round the body of the Buddha and spreads his hooded canopy over him. The relevant inscription identifies the *nāga* as the *nāga*-king Mucalinda.[107] The footprints in front of the *āsana* make it natural to interpret it as an indexical sign referring to the Buddha. I am however not fully satisfied with this interpretation. As there are no more indexical signs on the railing uprights, even this sign may be interpreted as an iconic sign representing a *buddhapāda* slab in front of an *āsana* used for *nāga* worship. If I am right in this interpretation there are no indexical signs pointing to the Buddha among the railing uprights.

The most frequent motif that appears on the crossbar medallions is lotus flowers. Many lotus flowers have heads of human or divine beings at the centre. Some crossbar medallions depict mythological creatures or animals while others are filled with *jātaka* tales or other narrative scenes.

Along both sides of the coping there are lotus stems flowing in rhythmical waves. The outer face of the coping contains purely decorative motifs. Along the inner face of the coping there are over forty monoscenic representations of *jātaka* tales, each occupying small space along the lotus stem.

4.4.3.3 Entrance Pillars with Yakṣas and Yakṣiṇīs

There are two kinds of entrance pillars. The first kind consists of nearly human-size *yakṣas*, *yakṣiṇīs* and other mythological creatures. They are all placed at the four entrances, just as if they are guarding the *stūpa*. The *yakṣa*-king Kubera (or Kuvera) is carved on a pillar at the north entrance. As Kubera is a *yakṣa* he is associated with fertility and wealth. He is also one of the four or eight *lokapālas*, the guardians of the cardinal points of the compass. Kubera is the guardian of the north.[108] Virūḍhaka *yakṣa*, the ruler of the *Kumbhāṇḍas*, is carved on a pillar at the south entrance. A representation of a beautiful carved *yakṣiṇī* or local goddesses is Chūlakokā Devatā (fig. 33). She is embracing a tree standing on an elephant. According to mythology, when a *yakṣiṇī* touches the trunk of a tree it immediately blossoms.[109] Above all, *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇīs* are symbols of wealth, abundance and fertility. More about *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇīs* in chapter 6.8.

4.4.3.4 Narrative Entrance Pillars

The second kind of entrance pillar is carved on the whole face, from top to bottom, with narrative scenes. Each face on the pillar consists of three panels

[106] Ibid., Pl. XXXIX, B 31a.
[107] Ibid., p. 104.
[108] A K Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas. Part 1 with 23 plates. Part II with 50 plates* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1980 (1928, 1931)), part. 1, p. 6.
[109] Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas* ..., part. 1, pp. 35–36.



Fig. 33. Chūlakokā Devatā. Bhārhut *stūpa*, entrance pillar, early 1st century BC. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

divided by horizontal bands of railings. Several signs on these pillars are difficult to explain as anything else than indexical signs pointing to the Buddha. The examples here will be taken mostly from two pillars, called Prasenajit- and Ajātaśatru-pillar respectively.

A distinct example can be seen on the Ajātaśatru-pillar. A ladder with two footprints is here seen standing beside a *bodhivṛkṣa* (fig. 4). As I have already said several times, it is impossible to know exactly the intention of a relief like this. For a discussion about the intention of this relief see 1.1.1 and 1.6.



Fig. 34. Indexical sign pointing to the Buddha and the story of the *nāga*-king Erapato. Bhārhut *stūpa*, entrance pillar, early 1st century BC. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

However, it is hardly possible to ignore the narrative context which allows the sign to be interpreted as an indexical sign pointing to the Buddha at the moment when he returned from the Trāyastriṁśa heaven. It is depicted in monoscenic or continuous narration, depending on how one interprets the two footprints. As we can see, one footprint is at the top and the other is at the bottom of the ladder. This may indicate that there is a time sequence recorded in the relief.

On the Prasenajit entrance pillar there is a sign interpreted as the story of the *nāga* king Erakapatta (fig. 34). The identifying inscription below the *nāga* tells that "Erapato nagaraja Bhagavato vadate", which may be interpreted as "the *nāga*-king Erakapatta Worshipping the Holy One". An *āsana* in front of a tree may here be an indexical sign pointing to the Buddha, even if there are no footprints in front. The reason for this interpretation is the narrative context together with the identifying inscription. The relief depicts three different stages of the story. In the upper part Erakapatta emerges from the river as a five-headed *nāga*. His daughter stands on his hood. Erakapatta is seen on his way to the Buddha in the right corner below. He is here depicted in human form carrying a five-headed snake over his head. This is an often-used way to depict a *nāga*. The last scene on the left side depicts him kneeling before the invisible Buddha. Therefore, this relief must be seen as an indexical sign pointing to the Buddha in a narrative context.

Another indexical sign can be seen on a damaged entrance pillar now in the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena[110]. Here we can see a pair of footprints and

[110] Barua, *Bharhut* ..., pl. XXIII, no 18. Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art* ..., fig. 66.

two riderless horses honoured with royal umbrellas. Just like the more famous carvings on one of the gateways in Sāñcī (fig. 5), this must be interpreted as representing the event when the Boddhisattva leaves his palace. Unlike on the Sāñcī gateway, the story is not represented horizontally, but vertically. Unfortunately, the pillar is broken in such a way that it is impossible to see the whole narration.

It is possible to discuss the interpretation of several reliefs in Bhārhut. It is, however, not my intention to discuss each independent relief and decide the intention and interpretation made by the artist or the beholder. It is enough with these few examples to conclude that on the narrative entrance pillars at Bhārhut there are several reliefs that can be regarded as indexical signs pointing to the Buddha. A couple of other reliefs on these pillars can in the same way be interpreted as indexical signs.

4.4.3.5 The Gateways

The eastern gateway is the only surviving one at Bhārhut. It is carved on both faces and the motifs consist of iconic and symbolic signs, such as animals, plants, *stūpas*, wheels and tridents. No indexical signs can be seen on this gateway. *Makaras* are seen on the end beams of the architraves.

4.4.4 Summary

It is most likely that there are no indexical signs pointing to the Buddha on the railing uprights, crossbars or coping. However, a couple of reliefs can be viewed in different ways. One is in my opinion an iconic sign depicting worship of the *nāga*-king Mucalinda. Then there are five medallions depicting worship in front of *bodhivṛkṣas*. These have been interpreted as indexical signs, but in my opinion they are nothing but iconic signs. On the entrance pillars, however, there are some narrative carvings that must be classified as indexical signs depicting the presence of the Buddha without his physical appearance. They all belong with all probability to the early 1st century BC.

4.5 Gandhāra

4.5.1 Introduction

The great interest shown in the art of Gandhāran art is due to the influence from the West. The majority of the Gandhāran sculptures reflect a considerably diffused expression of the Western style. It is not easy to distinguishing between Hellenistic and Roman influences. It has long been disputed where the western influences came from. Alfred Foucher believed that Hellenistic culture survived in Bactria and Gandhāra was for him the cultural extension of Bactrian Hellenism. Vincent Smith and later Mortimer Wheeler was of a quite

different opinion. They believed that it was the import of Roman objects, and possibly artisans, that provided the stimulus for the birth of Gandhāran sculpture.[111]

4.5.2 Early Gandhāra

We can right away conclude that there was no early aniconic phase in Gandhāran art. The later decades of the 1st century AD, under the patronage of the first Kuṣāṇa emperors, are commonly regarded as the start of Gandhāran school of Buddhist art.[112] Art was present, however, in the Gandhāra region much earlier. Gandhāra was an important outpost of Indian Buddhism in the Mauryan period. Buddhism was introduced there by Aśoka in the 3rd century BC. Pillar fragments from the time of Aśoka have been found in Taksaśīla (Taxila). John Marshall is of the opinion that there can be no doubt that the *Dharmarājikā stūpa* was originally founded during the reign of Aśoka.[113] According to Tibetan tradition it was in Taksaśīla that Aśoka lived his last days.[114]

The division made by Marshall, containing seven successive stratas, has not been seriously questioned. We may summarize the periods before Kuṣāṇa into three distinct periods. (1) The first period may be called pre-Greek (stratum VII) and continued until approximately 190 BC. (2) The following period is the Greek period (strata V and VI) which is dated between 190 BC and 90 BC. (3) Thereafter follows the Śaka and Parthian period (strata II, III and IV) between approximately 90 BC and AD 60.[115] It was only at the end of the third period that Indian, Parthian and Hellenistic elements became amalgamated into a clear Kuṣāṇa style.[116] A group of male and female figures discovered by Marshall at Taksaśīla are the earliest examples of sculpture in stone from the Gandhāran region. These sculptures may be earth goddesses and *yakṣiṇīs*.[117] It was during these three periods that Buddhist aniconic art developed in Bhārhut, Sāñcī, Amarāvatī, Bodhgayā etc. There are, however, no traces of a similar development or of influences from this art in Gandhāra during this time.

The reason behind this lack of Buddhist aniconic art in Gandhāra is difficult to discern. However, Lolita Nehru gives two possible explanations. Firstly, she believes that part of the answer to the problem lies in the fact that the political situation in Gandhāra was very unsettled. For almost 250 years Gand-

[111] L Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style. A Study of Contributory Influences* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 2–4.
[112] Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran* ..., p. 59.
[113] J Marshall, *Taxila. An Illustrated Account of Archaeological Excavations*. Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 23–24.
[114] Marshall, *Taxila* ..., p. 25.
[115] Ibid., p. 118.
[116] Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran* ..., pp. 68–72. W Zwalf, *A Catalogue of the Gandhāra Sculpture in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), p. 69.
[117] Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran* ..., pp. 69–70.

hāra was controlled by a succession of foreign rulers. At the beginning of the 2nd century BC the country was overrun by the Bactrian Greeks. They ruled for about a hundred years and were overrun by the Śakas in approximately 90 BC. Thereafter, Gandhāra alternated between Śaka and Parthian domination. It is possible, she suggests, that the Gandhāran situation then was not conducive to an extension of the Indian traditions of monumental stone carving into the area. The other explanation may be that artisans in Gandhāra continued to work in wood that has not survived, while further south in India they moved into a phase of carving in stone.[118]

4.5.3 Gandhāra under the Kuṣāṇas

The Kuṣāṇa period in Gandhāra began in the middle of the 1st century AD. The early Kuṣāṇa period in Taksaśīla is covered by stratum I at Sirkap from approximately AD 60.[119] It was during the reign of Kaniṣka that the enormous sculptural activity in Gandhāra started. Gandhāran art lasted approximately two hundred years. Kaniṣka ruled a large empire that stretched from the lands of the Oxus river, what is now northern Afghanistan, to Mathurā in the south.[120] The two main centres of the empire were Kaniṣkapura, just outside modern Peshāwar, and Mathurā. The exact date of Kaniṣkas accession is still a matter of debate. However, most scholars place it between AD 78 and AD 120.[121] We will in this study take the year AD 78 as the accession of Kaniṣka, but it would make no great difference to our analysis if it was placed later.[122]

During the Kuṣāṇa period, the anthropomorphic image of the Buddha became popular in Gandhāra, as it also did further south in Mathurā. The Buddha images in Gandhāra were made in local grey schist in a Greek-Roman Apollo style. The artists in Gandhāra placed great emphasis on the historic life of the Buddha. *Stūpas* consisted of a series of tall, square bases upon which rested a small circular dome. Railings were eliminated and the *stūpa* was situated within a rectangular courtyard enclosed by a row of shrines containing Buddha images. The square bases of the *stūpas* were often decorated with narrative reliefs from the life of the Buddha. Many *stūpas* in Gandhāra were built by single donors. The artists seem to have been guided by some iconographic authority, because we find the four great events in the life of the Buddha depicted on many *stūpas*.[123] Many lesser known events in the life of the Buddha were also depicted in Gandhāra.[124] One special feature in Gandhāran art is

[118] Ibid., pp. 97–100.
[119] J Marshall, *A Guide to Taxila*, 4th Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 65.
[120] J M Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1993 (1967)), pp. 41–54.
[121] Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran* ..., p. 2.
[122] For a summary of the different arguments regarding the accession of Kaniṣka see: Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts* ..., pp. 253–258.
[123] Deheija, *Discourse in* ..., pp. 201–206.
[124] Ibid., p. 204.

that the Buddha, within a narrative situation, is depicted as larger than the figures that surround him.[125] As the Buddha image gained in popularity, the enlarged free-standing Buddha image became popular.

A few aniconic pieces can be found in Gandhāra. They are from a later period and have nothing to do with the development of Buddhist aniconic art. Probably the aniconic subject was borrowed from sites further south in the Indian subcontinent. A relief now in the Calcutta Museum depicts a pillar surmounted by three interlaced wheels. A pair of footprints can be seen on the base of the pillar. Two monks on each side are seen venerating the pillar or the footprints.[126] This piece is definitely a work from Gandhāra, even if the original provenance not has been established. It probably belongs to late 1st century AD, although the exact date not can be established. In the British Museum there is also a relief depicting three interlaced wheels. In this piece the wheels are held by an atlas just like a circus performer.[127] If these wheels have anything with Buddhism to do is difficult to know. Otherwise, wheels are in a couple of representations of seated Buddhas used to identify the first sermon.

4.5.4 Summary

During the period that Buddhist aniconic art developed in the Indian subcontinent, no such development occurred in the region of Gandhāra. A few Buddhist aniconic signs can be found among the art of Gandhāra, but they are from the Kuṣāṇa period not earlier than the middle of the 1st century AD. This was at the same time as artists also began to make anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha. Gandhāra had no part in the development of Buddhist aniconic art.

4.6 Bodhgayā

4.6.1 Introduction

When archaeologists from the West started to investigate the early history of Buddhism in India, most of the sites had been abandoned and forgotten a long time before. Two of the most prominent Buddhist sites, Bodhgayā and Sārnāth, were however never totally forgotten by the Buddhist themselves. Especially Bodhgayā, as it is the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, has throughout the history been one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Buddhists. When Francis Buchanan-Hamilton visited the site in 1811, a mission from Burma had been there just a few years earlier. Alexander Cunningham visited the site for the first time in 1861 and an excavation was made by

[125] Ibid., p. 206.

[126] J Marshall, *The Buddhist Art of Gandhāra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pl. 59, pp. 45–46.

[127] Zwalf, *A Catalogue of the Gandhāra ...*, pl. 202.

Major Mead shortly thereafter. Unfortunately, no report of this excavation has been published. In the late 19th century large-scale restoration was done by the Burmese in co-operation with the British. The aim was to restore the site to its original shape based on a small model from the 11th century excavated near the temple. This restoration destroyed much that would have been valuable for future research about the temple. No systematic excavation has yet been made at Bodhgayā, because it is preserved as a sacred place where archaeological excavation would be inappropriate.[128]

4.6.2 The Dating of Art in Bodhgayā

Bodhgayā is believed to be the place where the Buddha received his enlightenment. It is located not more than 20 km from Gayā on the bank of the Phalgu River in Bihar. The sacred tree under which the Buddha sat during his enlightenment became an object of veneration at least from the time of Aśoka. The tree, which now grows at the back of the Mahābodhi temple, is a remote successor.

A shrine was, according to a relief in Bhārhut (fig. 35), erected round the *bodhivṛkṣa*. Nothing of this shrine has been found. The tree shrine (*bodhighara*) seems to have been an elaborate two-storey construction and it is not unrealistic to believe that it was made of wood. A polished sandstone throne (*vajrāsana*) from the time of Aśoka is now located at the base of the *bodhivṛkṣa* behind the temple. It is the earliest artefact discovered in the place.

In the middle of the 1st century BC a sandstone railing was built probably round the *bodhivṛkṣa* and the throne. Today 92 uprights have been discovered. Most of them can be seen in the Bodhgayā Museum. A few are preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London and in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The railing placed round the Mahābodhi temple today is a copy of the original. The railing was enlarged in the Gupta period by new granite uprights, crossbars and copings.

The art seen on the sandstone railing in Bodhgayā seems to belong to the middle of the 1st century BC. Except for Cunningham who believed that the railings belonged to the Aśokan times, most scholars have placed it in the period between Bhārhut and Sāñcī *stūpa* 1. According to stylistic comparisons, Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty believes that it is closer to the art of Sāñcī *stūpa* 1 than to the art of Bhārhut. He believes that it belongs to the phase between 75 and 25 BC and comes close to Sāñcī *stūpa* 1 and could even possibly be contemporary with it.[129] It is difficult to date this work of art more precisely.

[128] G H Malandra, "The Mahabodhi temple", *Bodhgaya, the Site of Enlightenment*, Edited by J Leoshko (Bombay: Marg Publication, 1988), p. 10.

[129] K K Chakravarti, *Early Buddhist Art of Bodh-Gayā* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997), p. 58.



Fig. 35. Iconic sign of the *bodhivṛkṣa* shrine (*bodhigraha*) in Bodhgayā or an indexical sign pointing to the enlightenment of the Buddha. Bhārhut *stūpa*, entrance pillar, early 1st century BC. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

4.6.3 The Sandstone Railing

Most of the railing uprights show one medallion in the centre and two three-quarter medallions on the top and bottom. Most of these medallions contain full-blown lotus-flowers with heads of humans, animals or mythological creatures in the middle. The upper medallions depict *stūpas*, tridents, wheels, worship in front of *āsanas* and sacred trees and even *Jātaka* tales. Lotus flowers are depicted on the crossbars. Three uprights carry large figures of *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇīs* in high relief. Reliefs of Śrī Lakṣmī and Sūrya are also identified on the railing.

It is difficult to interpret any of the reliefs on the Bodhgayā railing as indexical signs pointing to the Buddha. This has, however, been done. A relief depicting a tree with a worshipper kneeling in front of it has been interpreted as representing Sujātā kneeling in front of the sacred tree. Already at the be-

ginning of this century Theodore Block assumed that the *āsana* seen under the tree indicates that the Buddha himself is seated there.[130] It is more reasonable to see it as an iconic sign depicting worship of a local deity. The reason for interpreting it as an indexical sign pointing to the Buddha and the enlightenment is of course its location in Bodhgayā, near to the *bodhivṛkṣa*.

A relief generally believed to represent the ceremonial ploughing is another one commonly interpreted as an indexical sign. Schlingloff and others are of the opinion that a scene showing a farmer at work with two animals in front of a plough represents the first meditation of the Buddha. The king was participating in a ploughing ceremony. At the same time the Bodhisattva practised meditation under the Rose-apple tree. This leads Schlingloff to believe that the sacred tree seen in the background represents the meditating Bodhisattva.[131] It is more reasonable to interpret this relief as an iconic sign depicting the ploughing ceremony or any other event connected with fertility and abundance.

4.6.4 Summary

The early Buddhist art from the sandstone railing in Bodhgayā belongs to the middle of the 1st century BC. It belongs to the time between the art of Bhārhut and Sāñcī *stūpa* 1. There are indexical signs pointing to the Buddha from the early of middle of the 1st century in Bhārhut. The art in Bodhgayā was created at the same time or later, but there are, in my opinion, no indexical signs in Bodhgayā.

4.7 Sārnāth

4.7.1 Introduction

The Dharmajājikā *stūpa* of Aśoka in Sārnāth was pulled down in 1794 by Jagat Singh because he needed building materials. This event brought Sārnāth to the knowledge of the Western world. Shortly thereafter Colonel Mackenzie carried out some excavations and in 1835–1836 Alexander Cunningham carried out fuller excavations.[132] Several excavations have been carried out during the 19th and 20th centuries and a large number of artefacts from the Mauryan to the medieval period have been found there.

Sārnāth is known as the place where the Buddha preached his first sermon. The old name of the town was Isipatana. It is today a small town 8 km outside

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[130] T Bloch, "Notes on Bodh Gayā", *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India 1908–09* (Calcutta: ASI, 1912), p. 143.

[131] D Schlingloff, "The Cycle of Birth, Youth and Renunciation". *Studies in Ajanta Paintings. Identifications and Interpretations* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988), p. 29.

[132] V S Agrawala, *Sārnāth*, 5th Edition (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1992), pp. 4, 7–8.



Fig. 36. Lion capital from Aśoka pillar. Sārnāth. 3rd century BC. Sārnāth Museum.

Vārāṇasī. Several monuments can be seen in the Archaeological Park. Two very famous pieces of art have been found in Sārnāth. Both were found during the 1904–05 excavation. One is the Aśokan pillar with its lion capital (fig. 36). A large stone wheel was placed at the top. The other is a Buddha image from the Gupta period sitting in *dharmacakramudrā* (fig. 46).

4.7.2 The Dating of Art in Sārnāth

The Dharmarājikā *stūpa* built of large bricks in Mauryan times was 13 and a half meters in diameter. A highly polished railing belonging to the Mauryan times was found buried inside the south chapel of the main shrine. It was made of Chunar sandstone and probably belonged at the top of the Dharmarājikā



Fig. 37. Iconic sign of wheel pillar. Sārnāth, railing upright 1st century BC. Sārnāth Museum.

stūpa.[133] The *stūpa* underwent several additions from Mauryan times to the 12th century.

Unfortunately, a lot of excavations were done in Sārnāth before modern scientific methods came into use. The few pieces of early Buddhist art that have been found in Sārnāth were not sufficiently documented when they were discovered. Some of the railing uprights and copings now in the Sārnāth Museum have for stylistic reasons been dated to the 2nd century BC. Others have been dated to the 1st century BC. The oldest carved railing in Sārnāth belongs

[133] J H Marshall, S Konow, "Sārnāth", *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India 1906–07* (Calcutta: ASI, 1909), pp. 71, 89.

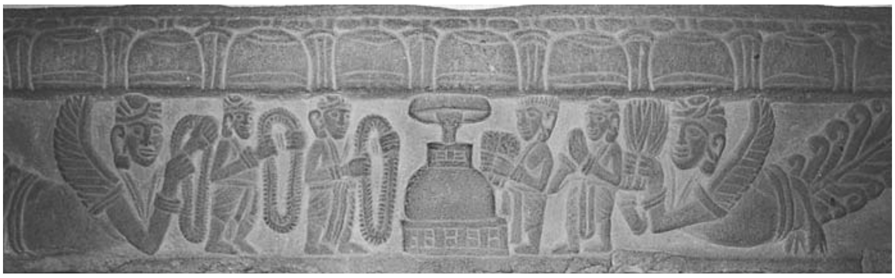


Fig. 38. Iconic sign of *stūpa* worship. Sārnāth, railing coping 1st century BC. Sārnāth Museum.

to the middle or late 2nd century BC, the same time as Sāñcī *stūpa* 2 or even slightly earlier. There are many similarities between this art and the art seen in Sāñcī *stūpa* 2. Those pieces in the Sārnāth Museum that have been dated to the 1st century BC belong in my opinion to the earliest part of the century.

4.7.3 The Railings

Very little is left of the railings in Sārnāth. The railing from the 2nd century has uprights with lotus flowers. This railing was found close to the main shrine and it is possible that it enclosed the temple and not a *stūpa*. On a very damaged coping it is possible to make out a human worshipping in front of a tree.

The uprights from the 1st century are decorated exactly like the entrance pillars in Sāñcī *stūpa* 2 with sacred trees, *stūpas* and wheel-pillars. A beautiful wheel-pillar (fig. 37) is depicted on an upright. The pillar stands in a *pūrṇaghaṭa* and two fishes in the shape of a trident are holding up the wheel. A coping (fig. 38) from the same time shows veneration of a *stūpa*. In the middle there is a *stūpa* and on both sides we can see humans and mythological creatures presenting garlands to it.

4.7.4 Summary

The early Buddhist art on the railings in Sārnāth is similar to the art seen on Sāñcī *stūpa* 2 and belongs approximately to the same time. Uprights and copings from two railings have been found. The oldest one is from the middle or late 2nd century BC and the later one is from early 1st century BC. No indexical signs have been found in the art of Sārnāth. Instead, iconic and symbolic signs are depicted on the railing. There are sacred trees, *stūpas*, wheels and lotus flowers, just as in Sāñcī *stūpa* 2. The art seen on the railing in Sārnāth together with Sāñcī *stūpa* 2 and some pieces from Andhradeśa, are the earliest evidence we have of an early Buddhist aniconic art.

4.8 A Preliminary Chronology of Buddhist Aniconic Art

It is now time to analyse and draw up a chronology of what we have found in the different sites above. It is, of course, important to realize that only a few, of all the early Buddhist sites that once was spread all over India, are so well preserved that we can make a reasonably complete picture of their art. In most sites there are only isolated fragments to be found. Even in such famous sites as Bhārhut and Amarāvatī only one fourth of the art connected to the *stūpa* has been saved. The rest is lost forever. Therefore, this will never be anything but a preliminary chronology of Buddhist aniconic art. We may divide Buddhist aniconic art in four periods. These periods can only be approximately dated.

PERIOD I (Up to the middle of the 2nd century BC)

Sāñcī (*stūpa* 2) (fig. 7–12), Andhradeśa (early pre-Sātavāhana) (fig. 18–19) and Sārnāth.

In this first period we have examples of signs depicting lotus flowers, animals, mythological creatures, *cakrastambhas*, sacred *vṛkṣas*, *stūpas*, lion-pillars, tridents etc. No *āsana* or *buddhapāda* can be seen. Nor are humans venerating sacred signs frequently depicted. Only in one relief (fig. 10) in Sāñcī, is there a pair of worshippers venerating the *cakrastambha*.

Many of the signs can be characterized as sacred and auspicious signs with no or only few Buddhist features. Many of them are the same as those that occur among the eight auspicious signs (*aṣṭamaṇgala*), viz. lotus, trident, *cakra* and royal umbrella (*chatra*).

There are only small fragments left from early wooden railings. It is, of course, impossible to know exactly their appearance. There is, however, every reason to believe that they resembled early stone railings from this period.

PERIOD II (From the middle of the 2nd to the 1st century BC)

Andhradeśa (fig. 20–25), Sārnāth (fig. 37, 38) and Bhārhut (fig. 31–33).

In this second period we have many examples of signs similar to these in the first period. However, the art also has many new signs. For example we see some *āsanas* in the shape of altars. They are placed in front of sacred trees (fig. 20, 23, 32), in front of a *cakrastambha* (fig. 20) and in front of a pillar with a lotus flower and a trident (fig. 22). In one relief the *āsana* seems to have taken the shape of a seat (fig. 20). In this period we also find the first *buddhapāda* slabs (fig. 24), as well as *buddhapādas* depicted together with *āsanas* (fig. 20, 22, 23). Several of the signs depict worshippers venerating the central cult object (fig. 21, 22, 23, 24, 32, 38).

This period marks the beginning of a Buddhist narrative art. In a relief from Amarāvatī (fig. 25) there are six scenes depicting places of worship. These places are not only Buddhist cultic sites but also popular places connected with *yakṣa* worship and fertility. In Bhārhut there are many reliefs depicting

Jataka stories (fig. 31). There is also one relief depicting queen Māyā dreaming about the elephant entering her womb. *Yakṣas* and *yakṣinīs* of nearly human size have been placed on the pillars at the entrances.

This period can be characterized as a transitional stage where it is possible to see how the signs from the first period have been more elaborately depicted. Signs in this period can not be classified only as sacred and auspicious signs. Several of the signs were definitely regarded as Buddhist signs in this period. Some signs may have been deliberately made by the artists as Buddhist signs. *Āsanas* in the shape of altars, *buddhapāda* slabs and worshippers were added in such a way that the reliefs may be considered as iconic signs of Buddhist cultic sites. *Jātaka* stories (fig. 31) and different *bodhivṛkṣas* (fig. 32) were of course not only regarded as sacred and auspicious signs. They were definitely regarded as Buddhist signs. *Yakṣas*, lotus flowers, tridents, *svastikas*, wheels, etc. may still been regarded only as sacred and auspicious signs, with no specific Buddhist features.

PERIOD III (early or middle 1st century BC to the 1st century AD)

Bhārhut (fig. 4, 34, 35) and Sāñcī (*stūpa* 1) (fig. 5, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 50).

This third period begins with the narrative entrance pillars on Bhārhut *stūpa* from early or middle 1st century BC. The compositions in these reliefs are more complex and elaborate than the reliefs from the same *stūpa* in the previous period. The period also includes the reliefs on the gateways on *stūpa* 1 in Sāñcī.

In this period we see a developed Buddhist aniconic art with indexical signs pointing to the Buddha in a narrative context. Fig. 4 from Bhārhut points to the Buddha's descent from Trāyastriṁśa heaven at the same time as it is connected with the site of Sankasya. Fig. 35 from Bhārhut points to the enlightenment of the Buddha. In the relief we can see the shrine built around the *bodhivṛkṣa*. In Sāñcī *stūpa* 1 there are many indexical signs in a narrative context (fig. 16).

Many of the sacred and auspicious signs that we saw in the first and second period are still commonly depicted in this period. *Stūpas* and *bodhivṛkṣas* (fig. 14), lotus flowers, wheels, tridents, *pūrṇaghaṭas*, *yakṣiṇīs* or *vṛkṣadevatas* (fig. 15) are found both in Bhārhut and Sāñcī in this period. The aniconic art in this period is definitely a Buddhist art with many distinct Buddhist features. The artist must have been aware of the specific features of Buddhist art even if some signs, such as lotus flowers, tridents, wheels and mythological creatures, were used by other religious movements as well.

PERIOD IV (2nd century AD)

Andhradeśa (fig. 1, 2, 3, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30)

Many indexical signs had by this period lost much of their narrative context. However, some (fig. 28) are definitely narrations in the same way as the signs in Sāñcī. At the great *stūpa* in Amarāvatī, three-panel slabs with a *bodhivṛkṣa*,

a wheel and a *stūpa*, were repeated over and over again (fig. 26). Buddhist aniconic art had in this period become highly formalistic and lost its narrative context. When anthropomorphic images began to be made in Andhradeśa they sometimes replaced aniconic signs. Anthropomorphic images of the Buddha and indexical signs pointing to the Buddha were also produced side by side (fig. 29, 30). The *āsana*, which in Sāñcī looks more like an altar, had developed in Andhradeśa to become a chair or even a throne.

4.9 Summary

We can conclude this chapter by establishing that Buddhist aniconic art belonged to a period of gradual changes. Buddhist aniconic art did not arise suddenly. It arose gradually from simple (sacred and auspicious) signs depicting tridents, wheels, sacred trees, *pūrṇaghaṭas*, lotus flowers etc. These signs were transformed into an elaborate and distinct Buddhist aniconic art with indexical signs pointing to the Buddha. In the 2nd or early 1st century BC there were signs pointing to events in the life of the Buddha. We can see this Buddhist interpretation at approximately the same time both in Bhārhut and in Andhradeśa. This Buddhist interpretation or incorporation of aniconic art can also clearly be seen if we turn our attention to signs depicting sacred trees. From the beginning the sacred tree was only depicted enclosed by a railing or with an altar in front of it. A stone slab with footprints was later placed in front of the altar. Later a chair or even a throne replaced the altar. This composition makes the sign more easily to interpret as a representation of the Buddha.

This transformation of aniconic art into a Buddhist aniconic art by the inclusion of it into a narrative and cultic tradition about the life of the Buddha, is not connected with a buddhological doctrine about the absence of the Buddha, or to a prohibition on depicting the Buddha. Furthermore, there is no indication that this Buddhist interpretation was connected with technical meditational exercises known as *kasiṇa*-exercises as described in chapter 3. Neither is there any textual basis for the statement that *buddhānusmṛti* was connected with aniconic art. True enough, this transformation precludes the existence of a commemoration of the Buddha, of the events in his life, of his nature and of his auspiciousness presence. But this is far from making this transformation part of a buddhology or part of the highly technical exercise known as *kasiṇa*-exercise and *buddhānusmṛti*.

To understand Buddhist aniconic art it is important to explain its gradual transformation. I will, therefore, continue with a comparison between signs from Buddhist sites with early Jain art and signs from ancient Indian coins and pottery. Thereafter, I will concentrate on a couple of important signs and point to the transformation that these signs underwent. We must, however, also be aware that different beholders may have interpreted these signs differently. It is probable that artists, local people and Buddhist monks and nuns had differ-

ent views about the visual art they saw. One and the same beholder may also have read these aniconic signs in several different ways. At the same time as a beholder read a piece of art as an indexical sign pointing to the Buddha, he may also have read it as an iconic sign representing a sacred Buddhist site. It is even possible that artists deliberately created signs with a conflation of meaning.

CHAPTER 5

Signs from a Shared Sacred Indian Culture

5.1 Early Jain Art

5.1.1 Introduction

In comparison with the amount of Buddhist artefacts, very little is left of early Jain art. In the 1st and 2nd century BC the Jains built *stūpas* just as the Buddhists. Unfortunately, no *stūpa* in good condition has survived up to this day. The Jains later abandoned this style of architecture. Only a few remains have been found that reveal the history of early Jain art and provide us with material for comparison. It is also necessary to look at some early Jain cave complexes to identify the common origin of Buddhist and Jainist art.

5.1.2 Jain Art in Mathurā

Mathurā was one of the main centres for the early Jain community from about 200 BC.[1] From its origin in the Ganges basin, Jainism spread both southwards along the East Coast and north-west to Mathurā and other places. Mathurā was at that time an important cultural and commercial city lying at the junction of two important trade routes.[2] On the political level Mathurā was the southern capital of the Kuṣāṇas.[3] Although Mathurā was an important centre of Jainism, Buddhism and Brahmanism also flourished in the area. According to Xuanzang, Aśoka built three *stūpas* in Mathurā.[4] There is an old legend about king Kaniṣka. It is said that he once came to Mathurā and worshipped a beautiful Jain *stūpa* believing it to be a Buddhist one.[5]

There are several separate mounds at Mathurā. Remains of both Buddhist and Jain sculptures have been found in Mathurā. Kaṇkālī Ṭīlā seems to be the most sacred Jain *stūpa*, although Jain objects have been found throughout

[1] Chakrabarti, "Post-Mauryan States ...", p. 295.
[2] Ibid., 296.
[3] Loc. cit.
[4] Xuanzang, *Si-Yu-Ki. Buddhist Records* ..., p. 180.
[5] J E Van Lohuizen-De Leeaw, *The 'Scythian' Period. An Approach to the History, Art, Epigraphy and Palaeography of North India from the 1st Century BC to the 3rd Century AD* (Leiden: Brill, 1949), p. 149.



Fig. 39. Iconic sign of *stūpa* with wheel pillar. Jain *āyāga-paṭa*, Mathurā. Archaeological Museum, Mathurā. From: *Jaina Art and Architecture*. Edited by A Ghosh. New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1974. Vol. 1, pl. 1.

Mathurā. The exact date of the *stūpa* is not established, but the *stūpa* is certainly very old. An inscription dated AD 127 or AD 157 mentions the installation of an image at the so-called Vodva *stūpa* built by the gods (*deva-nirmita*).[6] This shows that already by the middle of the 2nd century AD this *stūpa* was reckoned to be of considerable antiquity. It may not be totally wrong to assume that the main Jain *stūpa* at Kaṇkālī Ṭīlā started to be built in the 2nd century BC. It was a sacred site for the Jains for several centuries. A Führer excavated the site between 1888 and 1891 and discovered hundreds of Jain images and architectural fragments. The excavation proves the existence of at least two Jain *stūpas*.[7] Führer unearthed a brick *stūpa* of approximately 14 metres in diameter. The *stūpa* was not of solid brickwork, but made like a wheel with eight spokes. The spaces between the brick-spokes were filled with clay.[8]

Although there is not much left of the Jain *stūpa*, it is possible to find clues to its appearance. Firstly, there are two votive tablets, so-called *āyāgapaṭas*,

[6] D Mitra, "Mathurā", *Jaina Art and Architecture*. Edited by A Ghosh (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1974), Vol. 1, p. 53. Pal, *The Peaceful Liberators* ..., p. 258.

[7] R C Sharma, *Buddhist Art. Mathura School* (New Delhi: Wiley Eastern, 1995), p. 75.

[8] V A Smith, *The Jain Stūpa and other Antiquities of Mathurā* (Allahabad: Frank Luker, 1901), Pl. 3.



Fig. 40. Iconic sign of *stūpa* with gateway and two female dancers or *yakṣiṇīs*. Jain *āyāga-paṭa*, Mathurā. State Museum Locknow. From: *Jaina Art and Architecture*. Edited by A Ghosh. New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1974. Vol. 1, pl. 2B.

witch probably reveal the original exterior of the Kaṇkālī Ṭīlā *stūpa* (fig. 39, 40). It is possible here to see the common origin and similarity between Buddhist and Jain art. The railings and the gateways (*toraṇa*) resemble those in Sāñcī and Bhārhut. The same auspicious signs seen on Buddhist *stūpas* can also be seen on Jain *stūpas*, eight-spoked wheels, tridents etc. A part of the gateway on the Kaṇkālī Ṭīlā *stūpa* has been found. On it some mythological creatures are depicted worshipping a *stūpa* (fig. 41).

A Jain image was installed in the Kaṇkālī Ṭīlā *stūpa* in AD 127 or AD 157. Today only a part of the pedestal is left.[9] A beautiful thousand-spoked wheel, a trident and a lotus flower are carved in the middle of the pedestal (fig. 42). A child and three grown women with lotus flowers in their hands are seen venerating the symbols. Without identifying inscriptions it would have been impossible to decide the origin of this image. It could have been Buddhist as well.

Early Jain votive tablets (*āyāgapaṭa*) in square or rectangular format are very often decorated with auspicious signs. The purpose of these tablets is not fully explained, but probably they were placed in front of sacred trees, *stūpas* or in other sacred areas just to make the place more sacred. A trident and a lotus flower can be seen in one of these tablets now in Government Museum,

[9] Pal, *The Peaceful Liberators* ..., p. 104.



Fig. 41. Iconic sign depicting mythological creatures worshipping a *stūpa.* The Jain *stūpa*, Kaṇkālī Ṭīlā, gateway architrave, 1st century BC. From: J P Vogel, *La Sculpture de Mathura.* Paris: G. van Oest, 1930. Pl. VIII A.

Mathurā. It was made in the 1st century AD and it also has a sitting Tīrthankaras in the centre of the tablet.[10]

The Kaṇkālī Ṭīlā *stūpa* had similar gateways as Sāñcī *stūpa* 1, with brackets consisting of tree goddesses (*vṛkṣa-devatā*) grasping onto different types of trees just as in Sāñcī (fig. 15).[11] In addition, the railing pillars also consist of nearly nude females standing close to a tree. These *yakṣiṇīs* or *vṛkṣadevatās* are nearly nude, only adorned with necklaces, anklets and bracelets. These nude females on Buddhist and Jain *stūpas* are difficult to interpret in other way than that they reflect a notion of abundance and fruitfulness.

5.1.3 Jain Art in Udayagiri and Khaṇḍagiri Caves

On the twin hills, Udayagiri and Khaṇḍagiri, only 6 km to the west of Bhubaneswar in Orissa, there is some interesting Jain art. There are thirty-five excavated monuments on the two hills. Most of them are cave complexes, but an old absidal structure has also been found on the Udayagiri hilltop. The caves were built as dwelling-retreats for Jain recluses, who were recognized for their extreme asceticism and self-mortification. Thus, the height of most of the caves does not allow a human to stand erect. Some of the cells are so narrow that one cannot even stretch oneself.[12] Compared with Buddhist cave complexes there is no rock-cut sanctuary here. The cells were open either directly onto a veranda or to the open space in front. Although the caves were made as cells or dormitories for Jain ascetics, the entrances and verandas were richly decorated.

The dates of the different caves are difficult to determine exactly. According to inscriptions left in the Udayagiri caves, they belong to the time of the Mahāmeghavāhana ruler Khāravela. He was a strong supporter of the Jain religion. He is also known to have been contemporary with the Sātavāhana

[10] Ibid., pp. 118–119.
[11] Smith, *The Jain Stūpa* ..., pl. 34.
[12] D Mitra, *Udayagiri & Khandagiri.* 3rd Edition (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1992), p. 8.

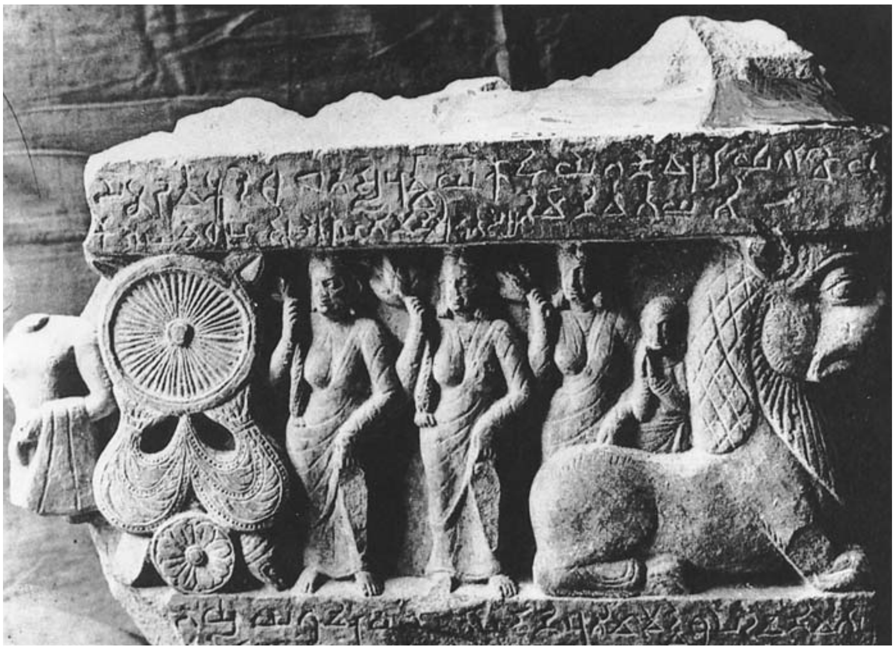


Fig. 42. Symbolic sign depicting a thousand-spoked wheel, a trident and a lotus flower. A pedistal from a Jain image, 2nd century AD. State Museum, Locknow. From: J P Vogel, *La Sculpture de Mathura.* Paris: G. van Oest, 1930. Pl. LX B.

ruler Sātakarṇi I, and thus lived in the late 1st century BC or early 1st century AD.[13] There is a great deal of similarity between the art on these two hills and the art on the gateways on *stūpa* 1 in Sāñcī. The art from Cave 1 (Rāṇī-gumphā), the largest cave complex on Udayagiri Hill, in particular resembles the art in Sāñcī. This is no coincidence because the art on the gateways in Sāñcī was created approximately at the same time as the art from Cave 1 on Udayagiri Hill. The art forms in some of the other caves are more primitive and crude and have a distinguishing regional character that can indicate that these caves were made slightly earlier. The caves of Khaṇḍagiri, with the exceptions of cave 1, 2 and 3, are of a later date.[14]

The early art still visible at Udayagiri and Khaṇḍagiri has very few distinguishing Jain features. There are only a couple of small symbols, such as *śrīvatsas* and *svastikas*,[15] which point to an already existent special Jain feature in early art. Most of the early art still surviving in Udayagiri and Khaṇḍagiri is of a common Indian kind. It is first in the later caves in

[13] See the discusion about the Sātavāhana chronology in chapter 4.2.5.3 and 4.3.3.2.
[14] Mitra, *Udayagiri & Khandagiri* ..., p. 13.
[15] Mitra, "East India", *Jaina Art and Architecture.* Edited by A Ghosh (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1974) Vol. 1, p. 81.



Fig. 43. Iconic sign depicting worship in front of sacred tree. Jain cave in Khandagiri, cave 3. From: *Jaina Art and Architecture*. Edited by A Ghosh. New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1974. Vol. 1, Pl. 27.

Khaṇḍagiri that typical Jain art with images of Tīrthaṅkaras are found. The Jain art in Udayagiri and Khaṇḍagiri has many common symbols and features with early Buddhist art.

Just as in early Buddhist art, there are a lot of lotus flowers, animals, plants, *yakṣas*, *yakṣiṇīs* and other mythological creatures depicted at these Jain cave complexes. Worship of sacred trees enclosed by railings can be seen at both Cave 3 in Khaṇḍagiri (fig. 43) and Cave 5 in Udayagiri. Reliefs depicting Sūrya and Śrī Lakṣmī are also present just as in Buddhist sites. A relief of special interest was found at Rāṇī-gumphā. According to George Michell, there is a riderless horse sheltered by a parasol among the many unidentified reliefs on the upper veranda.[16] How does one interpret a riderless horse in Jain art? This may be an indication that even among the Jains there was a period of aniconic art. If this is the case, the riderless horse may be an indexical sign pointing to Mahāvīra or another of the many Tīrthāṅkaras. However, there is another more probable interpretation of this relief. In a later chapter we will see that the artists and artisans who created Buddhist art were paid workers, working for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. It is not difficult to believe that the riderless horse was an old auspicious sign made by the artists at both Buddhist and non-Buddhist sites.

[16] G Michell, *The Penguin Guide to the Monuments of India. Vol. 1, Buddhist, Jain, Hindu* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 239.

5.2 Signs on Pottery and Coins

5.2.1 Introduction

The Indus Valley civilization is believed to have existed between about 2100 BC and 1750 BC. Archaeological evidence from the period between the Indus Valley civilization and the birth of Buddhism is scanty and incomplete. However, two apparently distinct but parallel cultures existed in ancient India during the Vedic and Upaniṣadic periods.[17] The first culture was characterized by a pottery known as Painted Grey Ware (PGW) and was in use circa 1050-450 BC.[18] The second is identified archaeologically by a Black and Red Ware (BRW) and had much wider geographic distribution and a lengthier history. BRW has been found virtually all over the subcontinent.

The Mauryan dynasty originated in the late 4th century BC and ruled until approximately 185 BC. Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) made its appearance in the Mauryan period.[19] For the first time, large portions of the subcontinent were unified politically. External factors contributed to the success of the Mauryas. The Achaemenid Persians must have provided a model of sophisticated statecraft. The highly developed stone working methods that characterized much of Maurya architecture and sculpture seem to have been partially based on Achaemenid techniques.[20] After the Maurya came what is commonly regarded as the Śuṅga period (185-82 BC).

5.2.2 The Indus Valley Civilization

According to seals from Mohenjo-daro and Harappā,[21] we can presume worship of trees (*vṛkṣa*) already in the Indus Valley civilization. Judging from the shape of the leaves on the seals, the sacred tree seems to be a *Ficus religiosa* (*aśvattha*, *pippala*), the same tree that later became known as the *bodhivṛkṣa* by the Buddhists. A human kneeling in front of such a tree can be seen on a seal from Harappā. Horns in the shape of a trident are also seen in the tree. The human is probably depicted as worshipping the tree or a spirit inherent in the tree.[22] The wheel, specially the six-spoked wheel, is also of great antiquity and can be found on many seals from the Indus Valley civilization.[23] Further discoveries have been a *svastika* and several animals, such as a bull, an elephant and tigers.

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[17] Huntington, *The Art of Ancient* ..., p. 33.

[18] J C Harle, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 19.

[19] H Härtel, "Pottery of Mathurā", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, Editor D M Srinivasan (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1989), p. 185.

[20] Huntington, *The Art of Ancient* ..., pp. 41–42.

[21] J Marshall, *Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Civilization.* (London: A Probsthain, 1931), Vol. 1, pl. xii, fig. 16, 18, 21, pp. 63–65.

[22] Marshall, *Mohenjo-Daro* ..., pl. xii, fig. 18, pp. 63–64.

[23] G Liebert, *Iconographic Dictionary of the Indian Religion. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), p. 51.

The Indus Valley civilization ceased to exist in approximately 1750 BC. There is a long period of time between this civilization and the origin of Buddhism. The controversy between those who assume that the Indian civilisation owed some of its aspects to the early Indus Valley civilisation and those who are convinced that there is very little to sustain such an assumption is still far from being settled. However, Jean-François Jarrige points out that the gap between the end of the cities of the Indus Valley civilisation and the estimated age of the beginning of the Vedic period is now filled by many archaeological finds. He continues that from the Neolithic time and almost up to the present day there has never been any definite gap or break in the history of the subcontinent.[24]

It is not possible to solve this controversy in this study and make any definite conclusion about the continuity between the Indus Valley civilisation and the later Indian civilisation. Especially on account of the long period of time it is interesting to notice the similarities between Buddhist signs and signs from the Indus Valley civilisation.

5.2.3 Signs from Late Vedic Times and Later

Punch-marked coins (PMC) are the oldest form of Indian currency and were circulated over a large area of the subcontinent. According to Pratapaditya Pal, PMC circulated from about the 6th century BC until the 2nd century AD, and even later in the south.[25] In the opinion of P L Gupta, punch-marked silver coins ceased to be minted in circa 200-175 BC, but the cessation of the minting did not stop their circulation.[26] In the opinion of Joe Cribb, however, the earliest PMC were not made before the 4th century BC.[27] They were all local and stamped with marks from 1, 2, 4, or 5 punches. In the 3rd century they were succeeded by national coins found throughout the whole Indian subcontinent. They all have 5 punch marks. According to Cribb, this shows that PMC were being made and distributed for between 200 and 300 years, beginning before 350 BC and ending in approximately 140 BC.[28] Cribb is also of the opinion that these coins were developed as a response to the use of Greek coins in the north-west corner of South Asia.[29] F R Allchin dates PMC slightly

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[24] J-F Jarrige, "Du néolithique à la civilisation de l'Inde ancienne. Contribution des recherches archéologiques dans le nord-ouest du sous-continent indo-pakistanais", *Arts Asiatiques* 50 (1995), p. 30.

[25] P Pal, *Indian Sculpture: Vol. 1 Circa 500 BC–AD 700* (Los Angelse: County Museum of Art, 1986), p. 67, cat. C1.

[26] P L Gupta, "Early Coins of Mathura Region", *Mathurā. The Cultural Heritage*, Editor D M Srinivasan (New Delhi: American Institure of Indian Studies, 1989), p. 127.

[27] J Cribb, "Dating Indias Earliest Coins", South Asian Archaeology 1983. *Papers from the 7th International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe, Held in the Musée Royaux d´Art et d´Histoire, Brussels*, Edited by J Schotsmans and M Taddei (Naples: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1985), p. 539.

[28] Cribb, "Dating Indias ...", pp. 539–542.

[29] Ibid., p. 549.

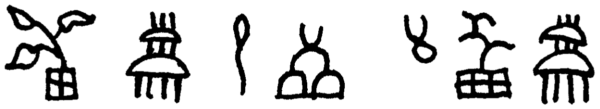


Fig. 44. Signs from Sohgaura copper plate, 3rd century BC.

earlier, around or a little before 400 BC.[30] Goyal is also of the opinion that they might belong to the 5th century. He says that PMC cannot be dated earlier than 500 BC.[31] Anyhow, PMC predates all still existing Buddhist art even when following Cribb's dating.

No inscriptions occur on the punch-marked coins. Instead, they were punched with different signs, both familiar and unique. On early punch-marked silver coins we see rayed suns, a crescent on a hill and trees within railings.[32] Following Härtel, there are a couple of copper coins from Maurya and early Śuṅga marked with a crescent on a hill, a tree within railings and a lion.[33] The national PMC marked with 5 punch marks has been found all over the subcontinent.[34] The marks on them include geometric patterns, plants, animals and different kinds of signs. Among these it is easy to find signs with great resemblance to later Buddhist signs connected with the life of the Buddha, the tree within a railing, the wheel and the *stūpa*, and also to other signs connected with Buddhism, the trident and *svastika*.[35]

A sign depicting a tree within a railing is often found on PMC. Peter Schalk has point to the multivocal association of the tree. On coins, the tree is often found in connection with worldly signs, like bows and arrows, indicating power. At the same time this tree can be associated with a "tree of wishes" that blesses the life of a king or a dynasty.[36] Coins with trees have been found as early as pre-Maurya time and were widespread in India. A tree within a railing was used by Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike and had from the beginning nothing to do with Buddhism.

The Sohgaura copper plate from the 3rd century BC has above the Brāhmi script a couple of signs (fig. 44) depicting two buildings, two trees within railings and a crescent on a hill.[37] A crescent on a hill, trident and cross can be seen on Rāmpurvā copper bolt, used to hold the lion capital in place upon its pillar. These signs were probably Mauryan royal marks.

[30] F R Allchin, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia. The Emergence of Cities and States* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1995), p. 218.
[31] S R Goyal, *Indigenous Coins of Early India* (Jodhpur: Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1994), p. 71.
[32] Pal, *Indian Sculpture* ..., cat. C1. Allchin, *The Archaeology of Early Historic* ..., pp. 220–221.
[33] H Härtel, *Excavations at Sonkh. 2500 Years of a Town in Mathura Districs* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1993), nos. K. 1–6.
[34] Cribb, *Dating Indias* ..., p. 539. Goyal, *Indigenous Coins* ..., 85.
[35] Goyal, *Indigenous Coins* ..., fig. 1–4.
[36] Schalk, "The Oldest Buddhist ...", pp. 316–318.
[37] F R Allchin, "Upon the Contextual Significance of Certain Groups of Ancient Indian Signs", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22 (1959), pp. 552–553.

5.2.4 Signs from Śuṅga Times and Later

It has been suggested that inscribed coins from Mathurā local rulers, the so-called Mitra-kings, Gomitra, Sūryamitra, Brahmamitra and Viṣṇumitra, date from the 3rd century and later. However, Härtel's discovery of such coins from the excavation at Sonkh, a site situated in the suburbs of Mathurā, place them from circa 150 BC to the end of the 1st century BC.[38] Thus, the 2nd century is a more likely date for the coins made in the times of the Mitra-kings. The coins of all the Mitra rulers have many signs in common. A female figure, commonly interpreted as Lakṣmī, is often placed in the centre of the coin. Other common signs are a six-arched hill, the so-called Ujjaini symbol (four circles connected by cross), trident, tree, crescent, *svastika*, *śrīvatsa*, and water (or snake). A couple of animals (bull, elephant, fish and lion) are also depicted on the coins, just as in the Indus Valley civilization.[39] Coins from the following Datta rulers are also marked with similar kinds of signs. According to Härtel, signs on 42 punch-marked copper coins from Sonkh consist of a sun, a crescent on a hill, a lion, a tree within railing, a dot with four crescents etc. These coins date from the time of early Śuṅga.[40]

In Andhradeśa a few early punch-marked silver coins have been found from the early 2nd century BC until the 1st century AD. The signs on them are a six-armed *cakra*, a trident, a hare, a sun, a fish, a cross etc. These coins are mostly found in or near to Buddhist *stūpas*. Twenty-four punch-marked silver coins were arranged in the shape of a *svastika* within the granite stone relic container in Bhaṭṭiprōlu *stūpa*.[41]

In the Sonkh area, PGW pottery occurs simultaneously with BRW. The typical PGW is decorated with geometric and abstract ornaments.[42] From the excavations at Sonkh it is first at the end of the 2nd century BC, in the time of the local ruler Gomitra, that we can find a few simple signs in the shape of a *nandyāvarta* and a *svastika*. In the last quarter of the 1st century BC the fashion for stamping the vessels with different signs became more common. Many different forms such as *śrīvatsa*, *nandyāvarta*, *pūrṇaghaṭa*, *cakra*, *svastika*, *haṁs*, a rosette, a leaf, a circle etc. turn up as decorative patterns in this so-called Kuṣāṇa pottery.[43]

In the archaeological site of Śṛiṅgaverapura, 36 km north-west of Allahabad, some copper coins and pottery with *svastika*, a tree within railings, a trident, a crescent on a hill, female figures and an elephant were found. This site is a tank complex and has no connection with Buddhism. Instead, it is

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38 S C Ray, "Stratigraphic Evidence of Coins from Excavations at Mathurā", *Mathurā. The Cultural Heritage*, Editor D M Srinivasan (New Delhi: American Institure of Indian Studies, 1989), p. 142.

39 Gupta, Early Coins ..., fig. 14.1, 14.2. Härtel, *Excavations at Sonkh* ..., nos. K. 54–72.

40 Härtel, *Excavations at Sonkh* ..., nos. K. 7–48.

41 Sarma, *Studies in Early Buddhist* ..., pp. 102–108.

42 Härtel, "Pottery of Mathurā ...", p. 181.

43 Ibid., p. 187–188, fig. 20.5, 20.8.

connected with the legendary life of Rāma as related in Rāmāyaṇa. These coins and pottery are not satisfactorily dated, but belong probably to the 1st century BC and later.[44]

5.3 Summary

Jain art from Mathurā and the twin hills Udayagiri and Khaṇḍagiri has revealed that early Buddhist and Jain art shared many features. Jains built *stūpas* and cave complexes just as the Buddhists. They also decorate their sacred monuments in the same way as the Buddhists did. Early Jain art was similar to early Buddhist art and they used the same decorative patterns of lotus flowers, animals, plants and mythological creatures. Even signs that we commonly associate with the life of the Buddha, the wheel, the sacred tree and the *stūpa*, occur in Jain art. This strongly indicates that early Buddhist, Jain and probably even early Brahmanic art has a common Indian origin that was still very prominent in the 1st century BC.

Signs depicting *svastika*, *śrīvatsa*, *cakra*, a tree within railings, a crescent on a hill, a trident, a cross, the Ujjaini sign and many others have been found on coins and pottery. Even animals such as lions, bulls, elephants and fish' were depicted on coins and pottery. A female figure commonly identified as Lakṣmī is often found on coins from Śuṅga times. Many of the artefacts discussed here were found close to Mathurā. One local site can of course not be used to draw an all-embracing conclusion for all coins on the subcontinent. However, there is nothing to indicate that regional differences will change the view that similar signs to those made in Buddhist sites were commonly used in many parts of India. Instead of interpreting these signs as purely religious, it is more likely that the signs marked on coins are a kind of royal insignia and representing a ruling dynasty, a ruler, a capital town or a state.

The similarities between signs in Buddhist and Jain art and on coins and pottery make it natural to assume that early art in India was a common art shared by Buddhists, Jains and others as well. Signs like wheels, tridents, *stūpas*, sacred trees and lotus flowers etc. was probably regarded as sacred and auspicious by a great majority of people living in the subcontinent. The signs marked on coins and on Mauryan pillars and copper bolts pointed to the fact that these signs were also used as royal insignias. With the reservation that there were many regional differences in the subcontinent there is evidence enough to regard these signs as belonging to a shared sacred Indian culture. The exact dates of these signs are impossible to establish but it is not going to far to suggest that most of them predate Buddhist art. The next chapter will concentrate on a couple of these signs and trace how they have developed in Buddhist art.

[44] B B Lal, *Excavations at Śṛiṅgaverapura (1977–86)*. Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, 88 (New Delhi: ASI, 1993), pp. 45, 60–63.

Even if there are such signs as trees, wheels and tridents in the Indus Valley civilization there is no clear evidence that this early art influenced Buddhist art. Archaeological evidence from the time between the Indus Valley civilization and the 3rd century is still scanty and incomplete.

KAPITEL 6

Transformation of Aniconic Signs

6.1 Introduction

An important point in this study is that early Buddhist art underwent a gradual development. We have already seen that Benda, from a literary point of view, points to Vedic origin of Buddhist signs. According to him, the historical Buddha is merged with the nature of the old Vedic sun-god Sūrya. It is however important to realize that there were both Vedic and non-Vedic influences in early Buddhist signs. In short, early signs on Buddhist *stūpas* were auspicious signs from a shared sacred Indian culture. They were transformed into a distinct Buddhist visual art. It is not unreasonable to suggest that most, if not all, of the signs, plants, animals and mythological creatures that we see in early Buddhist art have a pre-Buddhist origin. These signs belonged to a popular Indian culture. Some of them may even have had West Asian origins.

To reveal the development of Buddhist aniconic art more clearly it is time now to concentrate on a couple of specific Buddhist signs and pay attention to their Indian origin. Many scholars have taken for granted that interpretations valid about later Buddhist art, also are valid when interpreting much earlier art. It is, of course, impossible to prove an early connection between a sign and events in the life of the Buddha out of later Buddhist interpretations. Therefore, without taking later Buddhist interpretations for granted, I will in this chapter examine some signs and see how they have been incorporated and transformed in a Buddhist context.

6.2 The *Bodhivṛkṣa*

What seems to be worship of trees (*vṛkṣa*) is found already in the Indus Valley civilization. This can be seen on several seals both from Mohenjo-daro and Harappā.[1] In the Vedas and Upaniṣads we find sacred trees under such terminology as *vṛkṣa*, *vanas-pati*, *akṣaya-vaṭa* and *aśvattha*.[2] The Banyan tree, *Ficus indica* (*vaṭa*, *nyagrodha*) was also important in worship. Most of the chief

[1] J Marshall, *Mohenjo-Daro* ..., pl. xii, fig. 16, 18, 21, pp. 63–65.

[2] A K Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1979 (1935)), p. 7.

Indian gods have particular trees dedicated to them.[3] Sacred trees were already in the Mauryan times made of stone in the round. In the Indian Museum in Calcutta there is a sacred tree made of stone. It dates from Mauryan times or earlier and was probably made as a capital of a pillar.[4] We have already seen in chapter 5 that trees within railings were used frequently on old Indian coins. These trees were not Buddhist signs. It is more likely that they were associated with royalty and auspiciousness. Coins with trees have been found from pre-Mauryan time and onwards. Many of these coins can not be associated with Buddhist kings.

The *bodhivṛkṣa* is primarily the name of the tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. The *bodhivṛkṣa* has played an important part in the history of Buddhism. According to *Mahāvaṃsa* (ch. 18, 19) a branch of the original *bodhivṛkṣa* had already in the 3rd century BC been brought to Anurādhapura in Laṇka and planted there. In chapter 4 we saw that sacred trees were depicted on Buddhist railings as far back as we can go. We have also seen that sacred trees were used as indexical signs pointing to the Buddha. In the earliest times, however, the trees were depicted only as a tree enclosed by a railing (fig. 9, 18, 19). There is nothing particularly Buddhist about such a sacred tree except that it is placed at a Buddhist cultic site.

There was already a cult of sacred trees before the time of the Buddha. The connection between the *bodhivṛkṣa* and the enlightenment may not be as old as it is commonly believed. In some early writings in the Pāli canon, dealing with the time of enlightenment, the tree is not even mentioned.[5] In the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya Pitaka* the tree of enlightenment (*bodhirukkha*) is only briefly mentioned.[6]

We have seen the same kind of sacred trees depicted in Jain art (fig. 43). This is no coincidence, as worship of sacred trees was an old tradition already before Buddhism and Jainism comes into existence. Both Buddhists and Jains adopted this tradition of worshipping trees. Initially, the tree in Buddhist art was only an auspicious sign and was probably not even associated with the enlightenment. To let artists depict sacred trees on the railing around a Buddhist or Jain *stūpa* may only have been a way to make the area more sacred. As time went by these more or less decorative sacred trees became more and more associated with Buddhism and with a *buddha*. Finally, the tree became associated with the enlightenment and used as an indexical sign pointing to Buddha Śākyamuni and his enlightenment.

I do not agree with Alfred Foucher, Benjamin Rowland, Debala Mitra and others when they interpret all early Buddhist signs as referring specifically to the Buddha and his life. I believe it is a mistake to interpret such early sacred

[3] Liebert, *Iconographic Dictionary* ..., p. 346.
[4] Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian* ..., pl. 10.
[5] *Ariyapariyesanasutta* and *Mahāsaccakasutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya*
[6] [*Vinaya Piṭaka*]. *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka).* Vol. 4. Translated by I B Horner (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1951), pp. 1–3.

trees like the one seen on *stūpa* 2 in Sāñcī (fig. 9) as an indexical sign.[7] They must have been misled by later Buddhist art. The connection between sacred trees and the enlightenment of the Buddha is very clear in later Buddhist art. Images of the Buddha in *bhūmisparśamudrā* sitting in front of the *bodhivṛkṣa* are common. Sometimes even *Māra* and his army can be seen in connection with the tree. The connection between sacred trees and the enlightenment is also quite clear in aniconic art in Amarāvatī during the Sātavāhana period and in many other similar places. As the tree is closely connected with the enlightenment it has been tempting to go backwards and see all trees as indexical signs pointing to the Buddha and the enlightenment. It is, of course, impossible to believe that all trees in early Buddhist and Jain visual art point to the enlightenment of the Buddha. Instead, it is more probable that the enlightenment of the Buddha slowly became associated with the already existing sacred and auspicious tree. It is even possible that the story of the enlightenment may have been influenced by sacred trees in already existing art. In short, the earliest trees seen in Buddhist art are nothing but auspicious signs with no specific Buddhist features. Gradually the tree became associated with Buddhism and the enlightenment of the Buddha. Different *buddhas* became associated with different tree species.

6.3 The *Cakra*

The wheel (*cakra*) is an old auspicious sign just like the sacred tree. The Buddhists certainly did not invented the wheel. The wheel, specially the six-spoked wheel, may be of great antiquity since such signs are found on many seals from the Indus Valley civilization.[8] The eight-spoked wheel is associated with the eight points of direction (*aṣṭadikpāla*) and signifies universal supremacy.[9] The wheel is from Vedic times associated with the sun and the sun-god Sūrya.[10] Sūrya is seen riding a chariot with four horses in a relief from cave 19 in Bhājā.[11] Bhājā is a Buddhist cave complex from late 2nd or early 1st century BC. The wheel seen in this relief is very similar to other wheels depicted at Buddhist sites.

The wheel is also connected with a wheel-turner, a *cakravartin*. The turning of the wheel is one of the powers of such a universal ruler. *Cakravartin* is foremostly associated with a thousand-spoked wheel. In the *Cakkavattisīhanādasutta* (DN III:58–79) the righteous wheel-turning ruler is described as having conquered the lands from sea to sea with his sacred thousand-spoked wheel. The traditions of the sun-god and the wheel-turning monarch were incorporated into Buddhist tradition.

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[7] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments* ..., pp. 188–189. Rowland, *The Art and Architechture* ..., p. 85. Mitra, *Sanchi* ..., pp. 63–64.
[8] Liebert, *Iconographic Dictionary* ..., p. 51.
[9] Ibid, pp. 51, 80.
[10] Benda, *Der Vedische* ..., pp. 1–66.
[11] Rowland, *The Art and Architecture* ..., fig. 36. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient* ..., fig. 5.28.

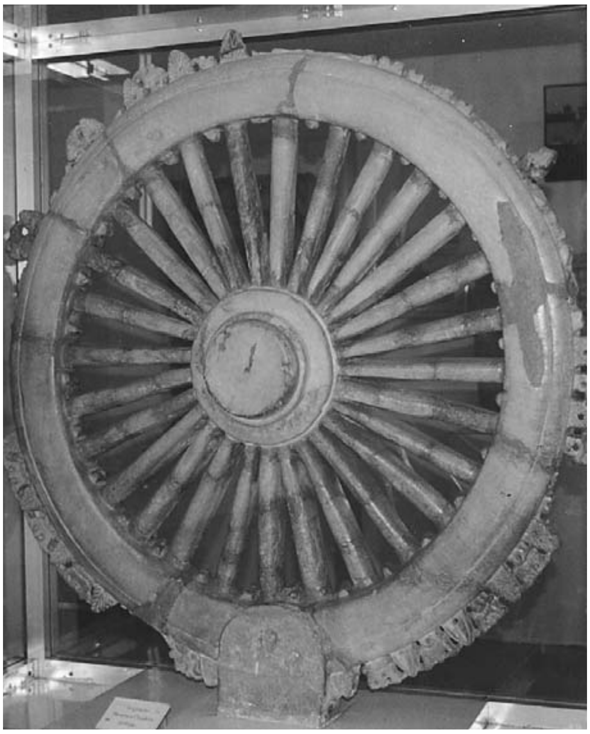


Fig. 45. Wheel. Amarāvatī, Mauryan times. Amarāvatī Museum.

The well-known Maurya lion capital from Sārnāth was crowned by a gigantic thousand-spoked stone-wheel at the top of four highly stylized lions sitting upon an abacus (fig. 36). The abacus was carved with four wheels between a lion, an elephant, a bull and a horse. The pillar was made in the Mauryan period, maybe at the time of Aśoka himself. The style of the Aśokan pillars has a combination of Iranian, Hellenistic and Indian features. Not many three-dimensional wheels in stone are left. One in good condition has been found in Amarāvatī (fig. 45). Fragments from another have been found in Sāñcī. However, there must once have been more of these wheels than the few extant today. The reason why so few have been found goes probably back to the fact that wheels made by stone were very fragile and that some may have been made of wood or even of metal.

Several wheels are depicted on the railings and gateways in both Sāñcī (fig. 10, 12), Bodhgayā (fig. 49), Sārnāth (fig. 37), Bhārhut and Andhradeśa (fig. 2, 21, 27, 30). The wheel is often depicted on top of a pillar and in some reliefs it is possible to see worshippers in front of the pillar. Worship of wheel-pillars (*cakrastambha*), as visible on a relief from Bodhgayā (fig. 49), indicate that worship of three-dimensional wheel-pillars was a common practice in early Buddhism. This practice seems to be confirmed in the *Mahāvaṃsa*. In chapter 36:103 it is related that during the reign of king Goṭhakābhaya (299–349 AD.)

wheel-pillars were set up at the four corners around the *bodhivṛkṣa* in Anurādhapura. Likewise, the Jains have their own wheels and wheel-pillars depicted on votive tablets (*āyāgapaṭa*) (fig. 39) and other places (fig. 42).

A wheel made in the time of Aśoka has nothing to do with the first sermon given by the Buddha. The wheel may not even have been a Buddhist sign at this early period. Wheels made in Mauryan times may instead have been associated with a wheel-turner, a *cakravartin*. The turning of the wheel is one of the powers of such a universal ruler. In the *Mahābhārata* the wheel is said to signify the wheel of a ruler's chariot rolling over his domains.[12] The *cakravartin* had a special place in the old Indian cosmic scheme and was recognized by Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism alike. The *cakravartin* is foremost associated with a wheel that possessed one thousand spokes. Buddhist wheels on the other hand have in most cases only eight or twelve spokes, due to their association with the Buddhist teachings of the eightfold path (*aṣṭāṅgika-mārga*) and of the dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). A wheel was painted in caves and monastic compounds from at least the 5th century AD as a *Wheel of Existence*.[13] In later tantric Buddhism the wheel also became associated with energy centres in the human body.[14]

The association between the numbers of the spokes and a special Buddhist doctrine is a later interpretation and not present in early Buddhist art. In Sāñcī we can see wheels with 16, 20 and 25 spokes and in Amarāvatī there is even a wheel with 32 spokes.[15] Therefore, in early Buddhist art it is not possible to decide the meaning of each wheel according to the number of spokes. Doubtless, the Buddhist wheel was developed out of wheels from a shared sacred Indian culture. The Buddhist wheel and the wheels of the universal ruler and the sun-god merged together in early Buddhist art in such a way that it is impossible to separate them.

A wheel on a Buddhist *stūpa* has nearly always been interpreted as an indexical sign pointing to the first sermon of the Buddha or as a symbolic sign referring to the Buddhist law (*dharma*). This is not surprising at all. The first sermon was held, according to the *Mahāvagga* (1.6.10)[16], in the deer park of Isipatana, the old name for Sārnāth. The famous Buddha image from Sārnāth from the 5th century AD (fig. 46) strongly emphases the connection between the wheel and the first sermon of the Buddha. The Buddha is holding his hands in the wheel-turning position (*dharmacakramudrā*). Six humans, a wheel and two deer can be seen on the pedestal below the image. The wheel in the middle must be interpreted as an indexical sign of the Buddha teaching the first five followers in the deer park. The one to the left is a female and may be the donor

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[12] M Stutley, J Stutley, *A Dictionary of Hinduism. Its Mythology, Folklore and Development 1500 B.C. – A.D. 1500* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 58.
[13] D Schlingloff, "The Buddhist Wheel of Existence", *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings. Identifications and Interpretations* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988), pp. 167–174.
[14] C S Prebish, *Historical Dictionary of Buddhism* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1993), p. 85.
[15] Knox, *Amarāvatī* ..., pl. 101.
[16] [*Vinaya Piṭaka*]. *The Book of the Discipline* ..., p. 13.



Fig. 46. Buddha image sitting in *dharmacakramudrā*. Sārnāth, 6th century AD. Sārnāth Museum.

of the image seeking to make herself immortal. This interpretation is rather obvious.

However, this connection between the wheel and the first sermon in later Buddhist art has led scholars to interpret all wheels in Buddhist art as representing the first sermon. This is the same mistake we have seen above regarding the interpretation of sacred trees. Because there is a connection in later art, the same connection does not need to exist a couple of hundred years earlier. There was a transformation in Buddhist art starting from when wheels were just made as signs of sacredness and prosperity. The wheel was already an important and well-known sign before it became connected with the story of the first sermon. Slowly the wheel became associated with the Buddhist *dharma* and later also with the first sermon of the Buddha in the deer park. It is important here to realise that the story of the first sermon may even have been influenced by already existing wheels. Existing art may influence stories just

as stories may influence art. Thus, slowly the first sermon of the Buddha became associated with a common, already existing sign, the wheel.

It is true that the first teachings of the Buddha, such as we read them in the Pāli canon and elsewhere, are an important part of the Buddhist teachings. They are therefore believed to be extremely old. It is even believed that the story tells what actually happened and that the teaching originates from the mouth of the Buddha himself. This story is present in two different places in the Pāli canon. We can find it in the *Mahāvagga* (1.6:10–47)[17], which is a part of the *Vinaya*-rules, and also in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (V:420–424)[18]. These versions are not part of the oldest remains in the canon. Nevertheless they do not emphazis the wheel in the story. In the much later *Nidānakathā*[19] and in other later texts the metaphor of the wheel is more clearly pointed out. Furthermore, the story of the first sermon is not recorded at all in the earliest of the Chinese scriptures which recalls the life of the Buddha.[20] Thus, scriptural versions of the first sermon vary to a high degree. This may indicate that stories that lay stress on the wheel are of a later date. The inscription made by Aśoka on the Sārnāth pillar also supports this view. What is left of the Brāhmī edict makes no reference at all to the first sermon in the deer park.[21]

Wheels in early Buddhist art had little to do with the first sermon. The reason why we find wheels in early Buddhist art may instead be sought in the shared sacred Indian culture. The wheel is an ancient sign for sovereignty and auspiciousness. We see it on the footprints of the Buddha (fig. 24), as well as in the wheel of a *cakravartin* (fig. 21). The connection between wheels and the story of the first sermon were probably not fully established until late in the 1st century BC or even later. Therefore, it is not unrealistic to believe that visible signs of wheels really did influence the story of the first sermon. The wheel was transformed firstly from a shared sacred Indian sign to a Buddhist symbolic sign and finally to an indexical sign pointing to the Buddha. The narration of the first sermon developed simultaneously with the development of Buddhist visible art.

6.4 The *Stūpa*

The *stūpa* was the most prominent cultic place for the Buddhist community from the time of Aśoka onwards. In the next chapter I will concentrate on the *stūpa* as a cultic place. Here I will only point to the fact that it was common

[17] Ibid., pp. 13–21.
[18] [*Saṃyutta-Nikāya*]. *The Book of the Kindred* ..., Vol. 5, pp. 356–360.
[19] [*Nidānakathā*]. *The Story of Gotama Buddha. The Nidāna-kathā of the Jātakaṭṭhakathā*. Translated by N A Jayawickrama (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1990), pp. 109–110.
[20] P E Karetzky, *The Life of the Buddha. Ancient Scriptural and Pictorial Traditions* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1992), p. 156.
[21] *Inscriptions of Asoka*. New Edition. Edited by E Hultzsch. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 161.

from early times to depict *stūpas* on the *stūpa* railing. This may be regarded as rather peculiar, but we may consider it merely as a way of indicating the sacredness of the area. As time went by depicted *stūpas* became associated with different *buddhas* and with their passing away. The *stūpa* together with the sacred tree and the wheel became associated with three of the main events in the life of the Buddha, the enlightenment, the first sermon and *nirvāṇa* (fig. 26). This is specially evident in the art of Andhradeśa. We have also seen that the Jains not only built *stūpas* just as the Buddhist, but that they also depicted them on the *stūpa* railing and on votive tablets (*āyāgapaṭa*) (fig. 39–41).

6.5 The Lotus Flower and Śrī Lakṣmī

The lotus flower (*padma*) is a frequently depicted sign on early Buddhist *stūpas*. This was already the case in the 2nd century BC and continued throughout the whole aniconic period. We have seen that three quarters of the medallions on the oldest *stūpa* in Sāñcī (*stūpa* 2) consist of lotus flowers. The lotus is an old Indian sign connected with water and fertility, but also with purity. The lotus is often in art seen growing from the mouth of a *yakṣa* or a *makara* or from a vase of plenty (*pūrṇaghaṭa*). The Buddhists were not alone in adopting the lotus flower in their art. We have already seen that in early Jain art the lotus flower was a common sign. Indeed, it was probably common to all religious movements in India.

Foucher has proposed that the lotus flower represents the nativity of the Buddha.[22] He denied that it was Śrī Lakṣmī standing on a lotus in Sāñcī (fig. 11) and elsewhere.[23] Instead, he believed that the female standing on a lotus represents Māyā, the mother of the Buddha. The only argument he had for his assumption is that two elephants are seen pouring water on her. It is true that a white elephant is often seen representing the nativity of the Buddha, but not two elephants as in fig. 11. The single elephant is a well-known motif in Buddhist visual art and can be seen in Bhārhut, but in this case there is also the elephant of Lakṣmī (Gaja-Lakṣmī). Lakṣmī is a goddess of good fortune.[24] Gösta Liebert believes that Gaja-Lakṣmī signifies Lakṣmī as a mother-goddess and a goddess of fertility.[25] Lakṣmī, in the shape of Gaja-Lakṣmī, was probably used as model by the Buddhists for Māyā, the mother of the Buddha.

Another way to depict the nativity of the Buddha is seen in Amarāvatī. The enlightenment, the first sermon and the *parinirvāṇa* are as usual represented by a *bodhivṛkṣa*, a wheel and a *stūpa*, but the nativity is depicted by waves of waters symbolizing lake Anotatta. The Buddhists were not alone in regarding the lotus as a highly valued sign. In Brahmanism and Jainism, just as in Bud-

22 Foucher, *On the Iconography* ..., p. 8.
23 Ibid., Pl. II 5–6, III 7–9, 11–13.
24 Stutley, Stutley, *A Dictionary of Hinduism* ..., p. 160.
25 Liebert, *Iconographic Dictionary* ..., p. 87.

dhism, the lotus is thought to be a symbol of purity and detachment. The purity of the lotus has been used by the Buddhists in describing the spiritual virtue of the Buddha. Just as a lotus flower rises to the surface and remains untouched by the water and the dirt, the Tathāgata remains in the same way unaffected by the world (SN III:140).

6.6 The Throne of the Buddha

We have already seen that in front of a *bodhivṛkṣa* there was often a rectangular stone platform. We have so far used the term seat (*āsana*) for all of them. It is now time to look more closely into this matter and reveal some of their special features. It is also important to examine possible lines of development of these platforms.

The medallions on the railing uprights in Bhārhut have several *āsanas* placed in front of *bodhivṛkṣas* (fig. 32). They are all depicted as altars and not as seats. Humans are worshipping in front of several of them. In some of the reliefs it is possible to see flowers and garlands laying on the platform. Nothing in Bhārhut indicates that the platforms were intended to be sat upon. Instead, I am convinced that the platforms visible in reliefs from Bhārhut are nothing but altars made for worship. No *āsanas* can be seen on *stūpa* 2 in Sāñcī. On the gateways at *stūpa* 1, however, there are several *āsanas* depicted (fig. 16). Just as in Bhārhut, nothing indicates that they are depicted as seats. In Andhradeśa from the Śātavāhana period onwards, however, the platform was depicted as a chair or as a throne.

It is possible to see a gradual development of these platforms (*āsana*) from an altar to a seat. In the earliest reliefs the sacred tree or the wheel pillar is only depicted enclosed by a railing without any platform (fig. 18, 19). Later, a platform in the shape of an altar is often depicted in front of the tree or some other signs (fig. 22, 23). In Sāñcī and Bhārhut the platform is nearly always made like an altar (fig. 16, 32, 34, 35). In the 1st century AD or slightly earlier the platform in Andhradeśa was replaced by a chair, an armchair or even by a throne (fig. 1, 2, 26, 27, 28, 30).

One way of interpreting these platforms is to consider all of them as both seats and altars at the same time. It is even possible that they all depict the diamond seat (*vajrāsana*) in Bodhgayā, on which the Buddha is believed to have been sitting when he reached his enlightenment. The notion of the diamond seat is much later and nowhere mentioned in the earliest traditions. It is not until the time of Xuanzang, in the 7th century AD that the term *vajrāsana* occurs for the first time.[26] Faxian mentions the place of enlightenment, but he never refers to it as the *vajrāsana*.[27] In earlier writings it is related that the

[26] van Kooij, "Remarks on Festivals ...", p. 37.
[27] Faxian, *A Record of* ..., pp. 87–88.

Buddha was sitting on a bed of grass, which he received from the grass-cutter Svastika. The diamond seat that Xuanzang spoke about is probably the same as the one that can be seen in Bodhgayā today. It is made of polished stone and probably from the Mauryan times. The likeness of this Mauryan diamond seat and the platforms visible on the *stūpa* railings are not striking. It can hardly be argued with any conviction that the platforms seen in front of *bodhivṛkṣas* and other Buddhist signs were made to represent the seat upon which the Buddha was sitting when he received enlightenment. It can neither be argued that it is the Mauryan seat that is depicted on the *stūpa* railings.

From the beginning the platform probably represented an altar. The reason why these altars were depicted together with a tree may be that they only point to the sacredness of the tree or, as Susan Huntington and Karel R van Kooij[28] have suggested, that they depict places of pilgrimages. Altars placed in front of sacred trees are of course not only a Buddhist practice. Worship of *yakṣas* was performed in front of a tree inhabited by a *yakṣa*.[29] The way of depicting *āsanas* in front of sacred trees in early Buddhist art might have found its inspiration from the worship of *yakṣas* and local deities.

The conclusion is that the platforms we can see on the earliest reliefs were probably altars placed in front of a sacred tree. Worship of local deities inherited in trees might have been the origin of these *āsanas* depicted on Buddhist railings. These altars were later replaced by a seat. A chair or a throne were placed in front of the *bodhivṛkṣa*. The indexical sign pointing to the Buddha became plainer and more easily recognizable with a seat in front of the tree.

6.7 *Buddhapāda*

In reliefs from Andhradeśa and elsewhere there are often feets or footprints (*buddhapāda*) placed in front of the *āsana*. The majority of reliefs in Bhārhut have no such footprints. Only a few of the reliefs from Bhārhut have such *buddhapādas*. *Buddhapādas* in front of the *āsana* make the sign more easily recognizable as an indexical sign pointing to the Buddha. In fig. 16 from Sāñcī no such *buddhapādas* can be seen, but we can still easily interpret them as indexical signs pointing to the Buddha. In fig. 24 we can see a stone slab engraved with a pair of feets or footprints. It must be such stone slabs that are depicted in front of the *āsanas*. These *buddhapāda* slabs were probably lying on the ground at the entrance, inside the railing or in front of a *bodhivṛkṣa* or a wheel-pillar. Several fragments from *buddhapāda* slabs have been found at the archaeological excavation in Thotlakonda and Bavikonda. From these excavations we may conclude that *buddhapādas* were placed on the *āyaka* platforms,

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[28] van Kooij, "Remarks on Festivals ...", pp. 37–39.
[29] R N Misra, *Yaksha Cult and Iconography* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1981), pp. 91–97.

on a specially made platform for the *buddhapādas* or on the ground by the circumambulation pathway (*pradakṣināpatha*) round the *stūpa*.[30]

The worship of stone slabs with *buddhapādas* was popular in Andhradeśa probably from the 2nd century BC.[31] A pre-Śātavāhana *buddhapāda* (67.5 x 46.25 x 15 cm) in the British Museum, dates probably from the 1st century BC.[32] An even older *buddhapāda* (49 x 42 cm) was found near the small village Kesanapalli, in the north-west part of Guntur district. This stone slab may, on palaeographical grounds, be dated as early as the 2nd century BC.[33] The soles on the earliest *buddhapāda* slabs in Andhradeśa (fig. 24) seem to be only engraved with a couple of signs, a *triśūla*, *śrīvatsa*, *cakra* and *svastika*.[34] As time went by more and more signs were engraved and the prints were also carved more and more widely. In the 3rd century AD as many as twelve signs can be seen on slabs from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. At that time we can found such signs as fishes, *stūpas*, pillars, flowers, urns of plenty (*pūrṇaghaṭa*) and mollusc shells engraved on the *buddhapāda* slab.[35] A large thousand-spoked wheel is engraved at the centre of each footprint. This wheel has from the earliest time been the largest and most prominent sign depicted on the footprint. In the canonical Pāli tradition it is believed that there are 32 important marks on the body of a *buddha*. It says in both the *Mahāpadānasutta* (DN II:16)[36] and the *Lakkhaṇasutta* (DN III:143)[37] that there is a thousand-spoked wheel on the soles of his feet. It is remarkable that the Pāli tradition does not mention any other of the signs engraved on the soles.

The same signs that are seen on *buddhapāda* slabs can also be found on Jain votive tablets (*āyāgapaṭas*). One of these signs is a trident (*triśūla*). It was used as a symbolic weapon against enemies or Evil.[38] We have already seen that tridents were used by Buddhists and Jains alike. In a Buddhist context this sign is called *triratna*, concerning the three jewels, the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *saṅgha*. Such a connection between the sign and the three jewels may be a late interpretation. For the Jains the three jewels symbolize right knowledge, right faith and right conduct.[39] Nothing indicates that these interpretations existed at the period of aniconic art.

Tridents, *svastikas*, urns of plenty and many other signs were regarded by Buddhists, Jains and others as auspicious signs (*maṅgala*). These auspicious

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[30] V V K Sastry, B Subrahmanyam, N R K Rao, *Thotlakonda. A Buddhist Site in Andhra Pradesh.* Andhra Pradesh Government Archaeological Series, 68 (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1992), pp. 9, 36.
[31] A Roy, *Amarāvatī Stūpa. A Critical Comparison of Epigraphic, Architectural and Sculptural Evidence* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1994), Vol. 1, p. 120.
[32] Knox, *Amaravati* ..., cat. no. 121.
[33] "Exploration in Amaravati ...", p. 3.
[34] Rao, *Buddhapada in the Early* ..., p. 3.
[35] Ibid., pp. 3–5, table 1.
[36] [*Dīgha Nikāya*]. *Dialogues* ..., Part 2, p. 14.
[37] Ibid., Part 3, pp. 137–138.
[38] Liebert, *Iconographic Dictionary* ..., p. 305.
[39] Pal, *The Peaceful Liberators* ..., p. 104.

signs were often taken together as a group of eight auspicious signs (*aṣṭa-maṅgala*). There are a number of different lists of auspicious signs which vary from each other, but what they all have in common is that the total number of signs should be eight. The main reason why Buddhists adopted these signs must have been that they were meaningful, important and well-known to the majority of the people in India. The *svastika* and other auspicious signs were often depicted on houses, temple doors and cattle sheds etc. for protection.[40] Using auspicious signs must have been a way for Buddhists to protect themselves, but also a way of popularizing and strengthening the Buddhist movement.

Footprints depicted in front of sacred Buddhist signs on the *stūpa* railings are nothing but *buddhapādas* lying on the ground in front of a Buddhist sign. In Andhradeśa in particular these footprints became an important part of Buddhist aniconic art. The indexical sign pointing to the Buddha became plainer and more easily recognizable with a pair of footprints in front of the seat. *Buddhapāda* slabs were common in Andhradeśa, but a few were also found in north and central India, in Sāñcī, Gandhāra, Mathurā and Bodhgayā.[41]

6.8 *Yakṣas*, *Yakṣiṇīs* and other Mythological Creatures

We have already seen a lot of different mythological creatures depicted on the *stūpa* railings. There are *yakṣas* (fig. 47), *yakṣiṇīs* (fig. 15, 33), *nāgas* (fig. 7), *makaras* and many others. *Yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇīs* are associated with fertility and prosperity and are also important as guardians and gatekeepers (*dvārapāla*). *Yakṣas* were originally regarded as a kind of local deity that lived in the forests and mountains and acted as guardian spirits of treasures.[42] *Yakṣa* worship was a *bhakti* cult with images, temples altars and offerings and, according to Coomaraswamy, there was no essential distinction between *yakṣas* and *devas*.[43]

Makaras are also often depicted on the *stūpa*. They are often represented as a creature with a head like a crocodile and a long tail ending like a fish's. Even creatures with heads of elephants, horses and lions with fishlike tailes are a common motif on Buddhist *stūpas*. *Makaras* and other mythological creatures are closely connected with water. This is of course also the case with *pūrṇaghaṭas* and lotus flowers. Lotus flowers are often seen growing from the mouth of *yakṣas* and *makaras*.

Yakṣiṇīs are the female counterpart of the *yakṣa*. They are a sort of vegetation deity and are closely related to the tree-goddess (*vṛkṣadevatā*). The railing pillars from Bhūteśvara in Mathurā are characterized by voluptuous women standing on dwarf-like figures (fig. 48). These female figures are nearly nude

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[40] Stutley, Stutley, *A Dictionary of Hinduism* ..., p. 295.

[41] A M Quagliotti, *Buddhapadas: An Essay on the Representations of the Footprints of the Buddha with a Descriptive Catalogue of the Indian Specimens from the 2nd Century B.C. to the 4th Century A.D.* (Kamakura: Institute of the Silk Road Studies), pp. 44–78.

[42] Liebert, *Iconographic Dictionary* ..., p. 350.

[43] Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas* ..., p. 36.



Fig. 47. Yakṣa on entrance pillar. Bhārhut stūpa, early 1st century BC. Indian Museum Calcutta.

but adorned with necklaces, anklets and bracelets. The Jain Kaṇkālī Ṭīlā *stūpa* and *stūpa* 1 in Sāñcī have gateways with brackets consisting of tree-goddesses (*vṛkṣadevatā*) grasping onto different types of trees (fig. 15). These goddesses are also depicted as almost complete nude. In the words of Coomaraswamy, "these figures of fertility spirits are present here because the people are here. Women, accustomed to invoke the blessings of a tree spirit, would approach the railing pillar images with similar expectations".[44] Thus, it only remains to agree with him and conclude that the young nude females often seen in early Buddhist art probably reflect a notion of abundance and fruitfulness. See also discussions by Klaus Fischer about these nude *yakṣiṇīs* and love-scenes on *stūpa* railings.[45]

[44] Ibid., p. 33.
[45] K Fischer, "Hidden Symbolism in Stūpa-Railing Reliefs. Coincidentia Oppositorum of Māra and Kāma", *The Stūpa. Its Religious, Historical and Architectural Significance*. Edited by A L Dallapiccola (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1980), pp. 90–99.



Fig. 48. Railing upright with female figure. Bhūteśvara, Mathurā, 1st century BC?. Indian Museum Calcutta.

According to both Buddhist and Jain literature, there are several different kinds of *yakṣas*, some are malevolent and take pleasure in consuming human flesh and blood, while others are benevolent and protective and fulfil the wishes of those who worship them.[46] The literature also describes converted *yakṣas*. Some of them were converted by the teaching of the Buddha or Mahāvira. Others were converted only through violence.[47]

The *yakṣas* were connected with different terrestrial and celestial regions. It appears that the worship of *yakṣas* might have been carried out in his natural habitats, such as mountains, rivers, trees, forests, tanks, houses, gates or specially shrines established for *yakṣa* worship. There are a number of places used for spirit worship (*yakṣacaitya*) referred to in Buddhist literature. It is also related that the Buddha used to visit them. Most of the *yakṣacaityas* might have been sacred trees, with or without an altar, but at some of the places we can assume a more regular building. Coomaraswamy pointed out that the Indian style of architecture is not sectarian. Therefore, the shape of *yakṣacaityas*

[46] Misra, *Yaksha Cult* ..., pp. 40–41, 45–46.
[47] Ibid., pp. 37–39, 41.

is that of the period.[48] *Yakṣacaityas* are described as places of resort and suitable halting or resting places for travellers. Buddhist and Jaina monks are frequently introduced as resting or residing at the haunt of such and such *yakṣa*, or in such and such a *yakṣacaitya*.[49]

It appears that worship in front of an altar and a sacred tree might have been inspired by *yakṣa* worship. The cult of *yakṣas* was one of the most important parts of folk religiosity. Buddhism tried to minimize the importance of this cult by incorporating *yakṣas* in the Buddhist cult. In Bhārhut we have seen *yakṣas* as guardians (*dvārapāla*) at the *stūpa* entrances. See chapter 4.4.3.5. Kubera, the king of the *yakṣas* was the guardians of the northern entrance.

The art on the Buddhist *stūpa*, with all its mythological creatures, was intimately connected with water, fertility, wealth and abundance. It was closely connected with a vegetation and fertility cult. We have already seen that Benda pointed to Vedic elements in early Buddhist art, but it is also important to point to non-Vedic elements. The incorporation of *yakṣas* and other mythological creatures in the Buddhist cult allowed the people to continue worshipping them. At the same time they became aware that Buddhism was superior to the *yakṣa* cult. Thus, visual art and literature dealing with *yakṣas* and other mythological creatures tell us how Buddhism made use of local deities in order to establish and legitimate the faith within a local society.

6.9 Summary

As Buddhism originated in an Indian cultural tradition, it is not strange that it adopted many popular cults and expressions. Auspicious signs and mythological creatures point to the fact that early Buddhist art was intimately connected with fertility, wealth and abundance. It was signs from a shared sacred Indian culture that were incorporated in Buddhist cultic life as a way to protect and popularize the Buddhist movement and to establish and legitimate it within a local society. Both Vedic and non-Vedic influences are reflected in early Buddhist art. There was a gradual transformation from auspicious signs belonging to a shared sacred Indian culture into an elaborated and distinguished Buddhist aniconic art with indexical signs pointing to the Buddha. This transformation was indicated by the connection of auspicious signs with a narrative tradition about the life and teachings of the Buddha.

It has been suggested that early Buddhist art incorporated pre-Buddhist elements.[50] This may not be correct. Instead, it may be closer to the truth to say that early Buddhist art was from the beginning nothing but part of a shared sacred Indian culture. Slowly this sacred and auspicious art changed into specific Buddhist features with symbolic and indexical signs pointing to the Bud-

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48 Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣa* ..., p. 18.
49 Ibid., p. 23.
50 Harle, *The Art and Architecture* ..., p. 28.

dha and his teachings. There is a close connection between several signs in Buddhist art and events in the life of the Buddha. The sacred tree is closely connected with the enlightenment and the wheel with the first sermon. This connection may not be as old as it is commonly believed. Scholars have been misled by later Buddhist art. It is, of course, not correct to interpret early Buddhist art backwards and see all signs as indexical or symbolical signs pointing to the Buddha and his teachings only because this connection existed in later Buddhist art.

It is also important to recognize that signs used by the Buddhists were not adopted only to illustrate already existing Buddhist dogmas or stories. Some of the signs may have influenced Buddhist writings as well. The development of Buddhist art and literature was a gradual and mutual process. There was an interaction between events told about the Buddha and visual signs from ancient Indian art. Here as in all places, art creates stories and stories create art. Stories about events in the life of the Buddha both reflected and shaped the historic situations in which they were composed. Art and literature existed interdependently. This is important for the understanding of the origin of early Buddhist visual art and the development of indexical signs referring to the Buddha.

CHAPTER 7

The *Stūpa* and Early Buddhist Art as Auspicious Signs

7.1 Introduction

To discuss the transformation of early sacred and auspicious signs into symbolic and indexical Buddhist signs it is necessary to draw attention to the most important cultic place in Buddhism, the *stūpa*. It is here in the cultic practice connected with the *stūpa* that we can study the process of transformation.

7.2 The *Stūpa*

7.2.1 The *Bodhivṛkṣa*, the *Cakra* and the *Stūpa*

We have seen that the three specific signs, the *bodhivṛkṣa*, the *cakra* and the *stūpa*, occur frequently at all the sites we have investigated. These three signs became closely connected with three of the most important events in the life of the Buddha, the enlightenment, the first sermon and the *parinirvāṇa*. The *bodhivṛkṣa*, the *cakra* and the *stūpa* were of course not only depicted in reliefs. The earliest Buddhist cult practice focused on these three objects.

Cuttings were taken from the *bodhivṛkṣa* in Bodhgayā and planted in all major Buddhist sites all over the subcontinent. The famous story of how Saṃghamittā, the sister of Mahinda, carried a *bodhivṛkṣa* to Laṇka is told in chapter nineteen in the *Mahāvaṃsa*. A railing is the main thing that distinguishes a sacred tree from an ordinary tree. At some places the railing was made just like a temple around the tree. A relief at Bhārhut (fig. 35) clearly shows how large such a building could be. A wheel-pillar (*cakrastambha*) was also placed at Buddhist sites. Wheels from the time of Aśoka have been found both in Sārnāth and Amarāvatī. In a relief from Bodhgayā (fig. 49) we can see a couple worshipping in front of a wheel placed inside an apsidal temple. A *stūpa* was built foremost to enclose the relics of the Buddha. The *stūpa* was probably the main object of worship in early Buddhism. The main cult practice connected with the *stūpa* was ritual circumambulation, but looking at evidence from a relief in Sāñcī (fig. 50) it is also possible to suggest that the *stūpa* was celebrated with music.



Fig. 49. Iconic sign depicting worship in front of a *cakrastambha*. Bodhgayā, 1st century BC. Bodhgayā Museum.

7.2.2 The Dating of the *Stūpa* Cult

It has been assumed that the practice of erecting *stūpas* over corporeal relics was pre-Buddhist.[1] According to archaeological evidence, however, no Buddhist *stūpa* can be dated earlier than the 3rd century BC, with maybe the *stūpa* at Vaiśālī as the only exception. This is the conclusion come to by Herbert Härtel during his examination of archaeological research at eight prominent

[1] Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments...* , p. 21.



Fig. 50. Iconic sign depicting veneration with music in front of a *stūpa*. Sāñcī *stūpa* 1, gateway pillar, late 1st century BC or early 1st century AD.

sites connected with the life of the Buddha.[2] Thus, even if it is impossible to date the earliest *stūpa* exactly, we can conclude that the earliest material evidence of the existence of Buddhist *stūpas* is from the 3rd century BC or slightly earlier. The making of *stūpas* predates the generation of specific Buddhist motives by at least one century. There were approximately 80 years between the death of Aśoka and the construction of *stūpa* 2 at Sāñcī. The wooden railings at the earliest *stūpas* were probably decorated with auspicious signs and mythological creatures.

From archaeological evidence it is possible to assume that building and veneration of *stūpas* started shortly before the time of Aśoka, and may have become popularized during the reign of Aśoka. On the Nigālīsāgar pillar we are told in four lines that Aśoka enlarged the *stūpa* of the Buddha Konākamana to double its original size.[3] Firstly, this tells us that there was already at least one *stūpa* before the time of Aśoka. Secondly, the *stūpa* was not built to en-

[2] H Härtel, "Archaeological Research on Ancient Buddhist Sites", *The Dating of the Historical Buddha*. Vol. 1. Edited by H Bechert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1991), pp. 61–89. It is important to keep in mind that the conclusions made by Härtel rest upon the dating of the NBP (Northern Black Polished ware) which is debatable.
[3] *Inscriptions of Asoka*... , p. 165.

close the relics of Śākyamuni. Instead, it was built for the Buddha Konākamana. This indicates the importance of imagined continuity with the past. *Stūpas* and *bodhivṛkṣas* connected to mythical predecessors of Śākyamuni Buddha were depicted in both Bhārhut and Sāñcī.

Remains from the time of Aśoka or shortly thereafter have been found both in Sāñcī, Amarāvatī and Sārnāth. The *stūpa* in Vaiśāli may even antedate the Mauryan period.[4] Several other *stūpas*, for example those in Rājagṛha and Kuśinagara, have their origin at least in the 2nd century BC.[5] Thus, we must consider *stūpa* worship as one of the most prominent Buddhist cult practices from the time of Aśoka and onwards, even if there is only the Nigālīsāgar pillar edict mentioning it at that early time. However, there is no archaeological evidence of *stūpas* as early as the time of the Buddha.

If instead we trust written sources we get a quite different picture. In the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* we are told that it was the Buddha himself who made clear to Ānanda that his body should be treated as a *cakravartin* after death and be enclosed by a *stūpa*. There are several places in the Pāli canon where the construction and veneration of *stūpas* is mentioned. It is even mentioned that *stūpas* were made for monks during the lifetime of the Buddha. In *Udāna* (I:10) it is related that in the time of the Buddha, a monk called Bāhiya was cremated and a *stūpa* was constructed for his remains.[6] In *Aśokāvadāna* and other texts it is related that Aśoka ordered 84,000 *stūpas* to be built.[7]

7.2.3 Buddhist Sites as Auspicious Places

Early Buddhist *stūpas* were characterized by a large number of auspicious signs, local deities and mythological creatures. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the early *stūpas* were considered as highly venerated and auspicious places not only for Buddhists. It is likewise reasonable to assume that Buddhist monastic communities chose to establish themselves and built *stūpas* on sites already functioning as sacred sites. Gregory Schopen has recently investigated archaeological literature and found that many Buddhist monastic places in India were built very near or even in the midst of a megalithic cemetery.[8] If Schopen is correct when he assumes that Buddhist monks and nuns intentionally sought out places that were already occupied, it is not surprising to find the early Buddhist *stūpa* sites covered by sacred and auspicious signs. To choose already sacred sites is of course not unique for Buddhism, it is a world-wide phenomenon.

[4] Härtel, "Archaeological Research... ", p. 69.
[5] Ibid., pp. 64–65.
[6] *The Udāna*. Translated from the Pāli by Peter Masefield (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1994), pp. 10–11.
[7] J S Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka. A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 219–221.
[8] G Schopen, "Immigrant Monks and the Proto-historical Dead. The Buddhist Occupation of Early Burial Sites in India", *Festschrift Dieter Schlingloff*, Hrsg. F Wilhelm (Reinbek: Verlag für Orientalistische Fachpublikationen, 1996), pp. 215–238.

Buddhists made use of existing sacred places and local deities in order to ingratiate themselves within a local society. Likewise, the *stūpas* erected at these sacred sites were regarded as auspicious even for those who were not Buddhists. From donative inscriptions we can assume that it was important not only to receive merit through the donations, but it was also important to place one's name at the sacred place. According to all the so-called "votive" *stūpas* it was also important to be connected with the sacred site even after the worldly life had ended. It was an important part in the religious life to be as closely connected as possible to the sacred and auspicious site, the *stūpa* and the Buddha himself.

7.2.4 Collective Craftsmanship and Patronage

In early Buddhist art there are no individual artists to be found. The building of a *stūpa* or other religious monuments was work of a joint nature. Artists and craftsmen (in this category I include sculptors, stone masons, painters, wood-workers etc.) worked together and were organized in guild teams (*śreṇi*).[9] As they were manual labourers they belonged to the lowest caste and the occupation was often hereditary. They were not artists or craftsmen for religious purposes. It was a way of earning their livelihood. The artists and craftsmen were treated as paid workers, but it was those who initiated and paid for the construction who received the worldly prestige and religious merit. The similarity between early Buddhist and other religious art reveals that guilds of artisans probably worked for both Buddhist and non-Buddhist patrons. Vidya Dehejia has identified the same artistic hand on a 8th century Śiva temple in Bhubaneśvara and in the Ratnagiri Buddhist monastery some 120 km to its north.[10] The guilds of artisans moved from place to place probably together with their families and settled close to the site as long as the work continued. The construction of a large religious monument could continue for a decade or more.

The importance of religious merit in patronage can be seen in a short passage in the *Mahāvaṃsa* there it is told that when King Duṭṭahagāmaṇi erected a *stūpa* he was nearly cheated. A monk who hoped to share the merit with the monarch made a brick himself and placed it in the *stūpa* at the time of its construction. As the king was unable recognize and remove the brick, he had to give the monk a generous payment to ensure that the entire merit of the constructions was retained by the king alone.[11] The prime concern for patronizing religious monuments in India was acquisition of worldly prestige and religious merit (*puṇya*).

During the formative period of Buddhist art, at least up to AD 100, most religious monuments were raised through numerous small donations. It is evi-

[9] A L Basham, *The Wonder that was India*. 3rd Revised Edition (London: Sidwick & Jackson, 1967), p. 217.

[10] V Dehejia, *Indian Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), p. 14.

[11] *The Mahāvaṃsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, Translated by W Geiger (London: Pali Text Society, 1912), pp. 200–201.

dent from a quantity of inscriptions that collective patronage most frequently occurred among Buddhist and Jainist monuments during this early period.[12] It was not until the 3rd or 4th centuries that religious monuments were the result of royal patronage to any considerable extent.[13] Approximately 700 donative inscriptions have been found in Sāñcī from ordinary laypeople such as householders (*gahapati*), housewives (*ghāriṇī*), merchants (*vāṇija*), bankers (*seṭhi*) and weavers (*sotika*), but also from Buddhist monks (*bhikkhu*) and nuns (*bhikkhunī*).[14] Most of the donors gave only small pieces, such as a plain crossbar. Gifts were often made jointly by members of a family or a guild and a number of successive pieces of the railing were usually donated by members of the same family or by people from the same town.[15] It was probably not even necessary to be a Buddhist in order to earn religious merit by a donation to a Buddhist monument.[16]

The question of the final authority regarding Buddhist art is a complicated one. The artistic decisions would have been made by one or several people who had, using a term borrowed from John C Huntington, "iconographic authority".[17] In monuments supported by royal patronage there was probably an iconographic authority that was responsible for executing the royal desires in the appropriate way. In a *stūpa* constructed by collective patronage it may have been more complicated. The donors had probably none or very little deciding influence regarding the artistic execution. The final decision was probably in the hands of the collective of monks or nuns living at the Buddhist site or the iconographic authority of the guild team. The iconographic authority would have been either a monk or an artistic supervisor connected to a particular guild team. The similarity between Buddhist, Jain and other art may be due to the fact that the iconographic authorities were artistic supervisors from the guild teams.

7.3 The Cult of the *Stūpa*

7.3.1 Monks and Nuns in the *Stūpa* Cult

It has been assumed for a long time that it was laypeople who initiated the cult of the *stūpa*.[18] The textual evidence for this comes from *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* where the Buddha replies to Ānanda that he should not bother about *sarīra-*

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[12] V Dehejia, "The Collective and Popular Basis of Early Buddhist Patronage. Sacred Monuments, 100 BC-AD 250", *The Powers of Art. Patronage in Indian Culture*, Edited by Barbara Stoler Miller (Delhi: Oxford Univiversity Press, 1992), p. 44.
[13] V Dehejia, "Patron, Artist and Temple", *Royal Patrons and Great Temple Art*, Edited by V Dehejia (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1988), pp. 4–6.
[14] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments...* , pp. 297–372.
[15] Dehejia, "The Collective... ", p. 37.
[16] Ibid., p. 40.
[17] J C Huntington, "Pilgrimage as Image. The Cult of the Aṣṭamahāprātihārya. Part 1", *Orientations* 18.4 (1987), p. 59.
[18] See for example Hirakawa, *The Rise of Mahāyāna...* , p. 102.

pūjā of the physical body of the Buddha.[19] *Sarīra-pūjā* has commonly been translated as worship of the relics, but this has recently been questioned by Schopen. He has argued that the term *sarīra-pūjā* should be read as a reference to funeral rites and not to the veneration of relics.[20]

There is also archaeological evidence that monks and nuns participated in the construction and veneration of *stūpas*. As early as the 2nd century BC there are donative inscriptions with a considerable proportion of monks and nuns as donors. Many of them were not only simple monks and nuns, but also doctrinal specialists such as *bhānakas*, *trepiṭakas*, *vainayikas*, *prāhaṇīkas* etc.[21] Almost forty per cent of the donors at Sāñcī were monks or nuns, according to the inscriptions.[22] The donations made by monks and nuns so that they could receive merit indicate the importance of the *stūpa* as an object of worship.

Rules concerning the cult of the *stūpa* are present in the *Vinayas* of *Mahīśāsakas*, *Dharmaguptakas*, *Mahāsāṅghikas*, *Sarvāstivādins* and *Mūlasarvāstivādins*. In the Pāli *Vinaya* there are no such rules.[23] Schopen has proposed that the Pāli *Vinaya* once had such rules, but that they were removed at a comparatively recent date.[24] No conclusive evidence for this assumption has been presented and several scholars have argued against such rules in the Pāli *Vinaya*.

Apadāna is a little known canonical work in the Pāli collection. Most of it consists of hagiographies of monks and nuns. The text is declared to be late work on the grounds that it is of a mythological nature and that there is mention of worship of *stūpas*, shrines and relics.[25] Due to the assumption that early Buddhism did not include worship and cults, Kenneth R Norman believes that the text is late. However, it must be considered as a compilation of texts of different ages, foremost from the 1st and 2nd century BC. The *Apadāna* is replete with specific descriptions of *stūpa* construction and relic worship performed by monks and nuns. There are at least 40 biographies in the *Apadāna* of monks whose pious acts are directly connected with the cult of *stūpas* or relics.[26] Monks also are connected with *stūpa* worship in the *Milindapañha*. It is related that before a monk engages in meditation he should venerate the *stūpa*.[27]

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[19] [*Dīgha Nikāya*]. *The Dialogues...* , p. 154.

[20] G Schopen, "Monks and the Relic Cult in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*. An Old Misunderstanding in Regard to Monastic Buddhism", *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks. Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Text of Monastic Buddhism in India*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), pp. 99–113.

[21] Schopen, "Two Problems... ", pp. 30-32.

[22] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments of Sanchi...* , pp. 301–383.

[23] Trainor, *Relics, Ritual...* , p. 56.

[24] G Schopen, "The *Stūpa* Cult and the Extant Pāli *Vinaya*", *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks. Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Text of Monastic Buddhism in India*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), p. 86–98.

[25] Norman, *A History...* , p. 90.

[26] J S Walters, "*Stūpa*, Story, and Empire. Constructions of the Buddha Biography in Early Post-Aśokan India", *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*. Edited by J Schober (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), pp. 169, 184–185 n. 32.

[27] [*Milindapañha*]. *The Question of King Milinda*, Vol. 2, Translated by T W Rhys Davids (New York: Dover Publication, 1963 (1894)), pp. 280–281.

7.3.2 The Buddha and his Bones

The relics of the Buddha can be of three kinds, his body (*śarīrika*), things connected to him (*paribhogaka*) and reminders (*uddeśaka*). The first group consists of the actual bones left after the cremation. The second group consists of such things as his clothes and bowls for almsgiving (*pātra*). Finally, images of the Buddha belong to the third group. The most valuable item to be enclosed in a *stūpa* was a relic of his body. Several caskets were often used, one within the other with the innermost containing the relics. Pieces of gold, silver and various metal pieces and precious stones were also enclosed inside the relic caskets.

Not only the relics of the Buddha were enclosed inside the *stūpa*. The bones and ashes of his disciples as well as other monks and nuns were also put in relic caskets and buried in *stūpas*. According to the inscriptions, the bones of 10 monks were enclosed in the relic casket found inside *stūpa* 2 in Sāñcī.[28] In the relic chamber inside *stūpa* 3 in Sāñcī two relic caskets were found. Inside the caskets were the bones and ashes of Śāriputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana, two of the chief disciples of the Buddha.[29] The remains of local monks and nuns were probably placed in all those small so-called "votive" stūpas, which cover several of the monastic sites.[30]

7.3.3 Pilgrimage and the Life of the Buddha

The classic source for Buddhist pilgrimage comes from the final weeks of the Buddha described in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (DN II:140–141). Here the Buddha says that four places connected with events in his life, birth, enlightenment, first sermon and *parinirvāṇa*, are all sacred places worth visiting.[31] Even if it is not actually specified that *stūpas* were erected at these four places, we can be quite certain that at least from the 3rd century BC there were *stūpas* to venerate. We have already seen that Foucher and others have assumed that it was pilgrimages to these places that were the origin of Buddhist aniconic art. For Foucher the origin of Buddhist aniconic art seems very simple. Buddhist pilgrims went to the four sacred sites connected with the life of the Buddha. At these sites the pilgrims obtained small material souvenirs to bring back home as momentoes or they brought them as votive offerings when visiting the sites.[32]

This simplified picture is not sufficient as an explanation of the origin of Buddhist aniconic art. Instead, it is important to see Buddhist pilgrimages in

[28] Marshall, Foucher, *The Monuments...* , p. 81.
[29] Ibid., p. 296.
[30] G Schopen, "Burial *Ad Sanctos* and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism. A Study in the Archaeology of Religions", *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks. Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Text of Monastic Buddhism in India*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), p. 122.
[31] [*Dīgha Nikāya*]. *The Dialogues...* , Part 2, pp. 153–154.
[32] Foucher, *The Beginnings of...* , p. 11. Foucher, *On the Iconography...* , p. 8.

close connection with other Buddhist cult practices and the development of biographies of the Buddha. Foucher seems to believe that the biography of the Buddha was fixed at an early time and that visual art merely illustrated stories that had already been written down. He neglects the fact that there is a complex connection between written texts and visual art. No complete biography of the Buddha exists in the Pāli canon. It is not until several centuries later, with *Nidānakathā*, that we have the first complete biography of the Buddha. However, there is no point denying that pilgrimage had an important part in the transformation of Buddhist aniconic art.

7.3.4 The Presence of the Buddha

There is a clear distinction between worship (*pūjā*) of a Hindu god and veneration (*vandanā*) of a Buddha image. Food offered to a god in a Hindu *pūjā* is distributed among the worshippers. This practice implies that one derives benefit from the close contact of one's food with a divinity.[33] Food placed before a Buddha image is not shared with the Buddha. Before every meal in a monastery in highland Sri Lanka a portion of the food is laid before the principal Buddha image. The shrine is emptied for a couple of minutes and the food is taken out again and thrown away. The food offered before the image is treated as if it has been given to the *saṅgha* and for this reason is no longer allowed for lay use.[34]

We do not know much about food offerings to the *stūpa* in early Buddhism. However, the practice of giving away flowers can be seen in several early aniconic images. Images in Bhārhut are often depicted with *āsanas* covered with flowers. It is also important here to make a distinction between the gift of flowers (*pali*) to a Hindu god and the gift of flowers (*puṣpadāna*) in front of a Buddha image. The giver of flowers in a Buddhist *puṣpadāna* identify himself with the flowers. He demonstrates that he is like the flowers, flourishing and perishing and that he meets the same destiny as a flower.[35] A Buddhist *puṣpadāna* is a non-reciprocal and meditational exercise in "paying attention to death" (*maraṇasati*) and is not a reciprocal and transactional sacrifice to a god.[36] Most informants, both in Sri Lanka and Thailand, reply to the question about the meaning of giving flowers, incense or food before a Buddha image in much the same way. They are not given to the image itself, but out of respect to the memory of the Buddha of which the image is a reminder. They do it for the sake of the good effect on the giver's mind.[37]

However, there may be some reasons for questioning the view that this was

[33] R F Gombrich, *Buddhist Precept and Practice. Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), p. 142.
[34] Gombrich, *Buddhist Precept...* , pp. 140–143.
[35] P Schalk, "A Comparative Study of the Flower Offering in Some Classical Tamil̲ Texts, Including the Maṇimēkalai", *A Buddhist Woman's Path to Enlightenment*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Historia Religionum, 13 (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1997), pp. 213–215.
[36] Schalk, "A Comparative Study... ", p. 215.

the universally prevailing cultic practice in early Buddhism. I have elsewhere pointed to the fact that an image of the Buddha is believed to be a true copy of the Buddha and through the consecration ritual the image is regarded as containing the immanent presence of the Buddha himself.[38] The whole consecration ritual is done in such a way that it looks as if the Buddha is installed in the image. Every new image has to be connected with an old already consecrated image and consequently a cord connects the new image to it during the consecration ceremony. It is believed that this connection goes back to the first image of the Buddha. It is also believed that this first image of the Buddha was made at the time of the Buddha and was sacrificed by him. The consecration ceremony may indicate that images of the Buddha were regarded as the Buddha himself.

If this interpretation of the consecration ceremony is correct, people making *puṣpadāna* do it in front of the Buddha himself. Irrespective of whether the Buddha is considered as having ceased to exist or is present in an image, no sharing of food or sacrifice is made to him. In *Avadānaśataka*, written in the 2nd century AD,[39] it is described how a gardener offers a lotus flower to the Buddha. With his hand raised in devotion he simply hoped to attain Buddhahood because his act of giving.[40] One of the striking things about this story and others is that very simple acts of devotion and offering are said to lead to great results.[41]

In the same way as the Buddha in later Buddhism was regarded as being present in images, we have indications that in early Buddhism the Buddha was thought to be actually present in his physical relics. There are, if we are to believe in Gregory Schopen, already from the 2nd century BC and forwards inscriptions describing relics endowed with life. He has pointed to the word *paribhāvita* as used in several different sources in characterizing the relics of the Buddha.[42] However, *paribhāvita* means "enclosed" or "contained". Schopen, on the contrary, is convinced that an early meaning of the word was "endowed". For him *paribhāvita* means "filled" or "infused (with life)", "invigorated", "strengthened" or "made strong", "impregnated" and "animated".[43] Without taking his interpretation for granted, I think he is pointing in the right direction. If we consider the consecration of a Buddha image, it is not being too

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37 Gombrich, *Buddhist Precept...* , pp. 138–139. M Southwold, *Buddhism in Life. The Anthropological Study of Religion and the Sinhalese Practice of Buddhism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 166–167. D K Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 26.

38 K Karlsson, "Can a Buddha Image be Untrue? The Grahi Buddha and the Way to Make Buddha Images in Southeast Asia", *Dance, Music, Art, and Religion*, Edited by T Ahlbäck. Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, 16 (Åbo: Donner Institute, 1996), pp. 204–207.

39 M Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*. Vol. 2 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), p. 268.

40 J Strong, "The Transforming Gift. An Analysis of Devotional Acts of Offering in Buddhist Avadāna Literature", *History of Religions* 18 (1979), p. 231.

41 Strong, "The Transforming Gift... ", p. 227.

42 Schopen, "Burial Ad Sanctos... ", pp. 126–128.

43 Ibid., p. 128.

bold to suggest that there already was a belief among some early Buddhists that the relics of the Buddha were infused with life and that the Buddha was present in the *stūpa*.

It is true that archaeology offers a perspective on what people actually did, as opposed to what they were supposed to do according to idealized textual traditions. A couple of inscriptions also tell us what some individuals did and believed, and they may represent typical expressions of the community at the time.

How was it possible for a Buddhist to believe that the Buddha was still present in the relics and the *stūpa* and at the same time believe that the Buddha had finally attained *parinirvāṇa*? Speculations about the nature of the Buddha became popular as a way to justify belief that the Buddha was still present and living among his followers in the form of his relics and the *stūpa*. Worship and veneration of the *stūpa* went hand-in-hand with different speculations about the nature of the Buddha.

7.3.5 Different Bodies of the Buddha

Speculation about different bodies of the Buddha are foremost associated with *Mahāyāna* thought and philosophy, but it may have started earlier. Chronicles like the *Mahāvaṃsa* can be described as extended biographies of the Buddha starting with his previous lives, continuing with his life as Śākyamuni and subsequently with the scriptures (*dharma-kāya*) and relics (*rūpa-kāya*) which he left to his followers.[44]

A text known as the Lions Roar of Queen Śrīmālā (*Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanādā sūtra*) is one of the earliest sources for the idea of the Buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*). It was probably written in the 3rd century AD in Andhradeśa and may be of *Mahāsaṅghikas* origin. The Buddha nature seems here only to be another name for *dharma-kāya*. Gadjin Nagao pointed out that the twofold body of the Buddha became more emphasized in the early *Mahāyāna sūtras*, such as the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*.[45] It can be questioned if there are any specific *Mahāyāna* doctrines regarding the bodies of the Buddha in the early *Mahāyāna sūtras*. In a part of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, translated by Lokakṣema in 179 AD, we can find the remarks on the nature of the body of the Buddha and the rationale for making an image of it. In this text there is not yet any idea of two-bodies of the Buddha. Instead, the body of the Buddha described in this text is a kind of glorified *rūpa-kāya*.[46] Paul Harrison has called attention to the fact that among both early and early middles *Mahāyāna sūtras*, no specific *Mahāyāna* doctrines can be found about

[44] F E Reynolds, "The Several Bodies of the Buddha. Reflections on a Neglected Aspect of Theravada Tradition", *History of Religions* 16 (1977), p. 377.
[45] G Nagao, "On the Theory of Buddha-Body (Buddha-kāya)", *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra. A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies* (Albany: Suny Press, 1991), p. 104.
[46] L R Lancaster, "An Early Mahayana Sermon about the Body of the Buddha and the Making of Images", *Artibus Asie* 36 (1974), pp. 287–291.

the bodies of the Buddha. The use of the term *dharma-kāya* in these texts does not suggest a departure from interpretations found in early Buddhism.[47]

It was in the philosophy of the *Yogācāra* school, represented by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, that the theory of the twofold body of the Buddha developed until it was consummated into a three-body theory.[48] The three bodies, according to the *Yogācāra* school, were the essence body (*svābhāvika-kāya*) corresponding to *dharma-kāya*, the enjoyment body (*sāṃbhogika-kāya*) and the transformation body (*nairmāṇika-kāya*). In contrast to the essence body, the enjoyment and transformation bodies are physical bodies belonging to the phenomenal world.[49] The establishment of this theory must have been preceded by a long and gradual development. Later on, the theory of the bodies of the Buddha was further developed and gave rise to a fourth body and other theories. It has also been suggested that there is already a primitive theory of three bodies in the Pāli Canon.[50]

This is not the place to enter deeply into complex theories about the nature of the different bodies of the Buddha. The purpose has only been to emphasize the importance of the Buddha in philosophical speculations. There is every reason to believe that this has its origin in speculations about the presence of the Buddha in the *stūpa* and was a way to feel his presence at the same time as he was absent from this world. Speculations about the true nature of the Buddha and his different bodies must therefore be seen as a further development of the cultic practices connected with the *stūpa*. It is important to realize that soteriological speculations were also important in the development of theories about different bodies of the Buddha. It is also important to remember that these theories had a long and gradual development. The developed doctrines of two, three or four bodies of the Buddha were late developments and they cannot be taken as motivations, but as justifications for making Buddha images.

7.4 Summary

This chapter has emphasized early Buddhist cult practices as a way of understanding the transformation of signs from a shared sacred Indian culture to aniconic representations of the Buddha. The cult of the *stūpa* was central in early Buddhism. It started approximately in the 3rd century BC. There is every reason to believe that Buddhist *stūpas* were built at existing sacred places and were regarded as auspicious places for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. This is particularly obvious if we consider all the auspicious signs and mytho-

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[47] P Harrison, "Is the Dharma-kāya the Real Phantom Body of the Buddha?", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15.1 (1992), pp. 44–93.
[48] Nagao, "On the Theory... ," p. 107.
[49] Ibid., pp. 107–109.
[50] Harrison, "Is the Dharma-kāya... ", p. 46.

logical creatures that are depicted in Buddhist cultic sites. The art on these early *stūpas* was of a shared sacred Indian culture without any distinguished Buddhist features. Auspicious signs, local deities and mythological creatures were included in the Buddhist cultic life as a way to protect and popularize the Buddhist movement.

The *stūpa* and its art were made by guild teams of artists and craftsmen. They were treated as paid workers and it was of no importance whether they were Buddhists or not. The *stūpa* was financed by numerous donations made by monks, nuns and laypeople. Donations were made with the objective of receiving religious merit, worldly honour and becoming close connected with an auspicious place. One important reason behind the similarity of Buddhist and other religious art may have been that the iconographic authority was an artistic supervisor from a guild team and not a leading monk or nun.

The Buddha was present in the relics, the *stūpa* and in Buddhist cultic sites. He was interpreted as an expression of auspiciousness. Events related about his life also connect him with liberation from this life. Later speculations about the true nature of the Buddha and his different bodies have also, to some extent, their origin in the cultic practices connected with the *stūpa*.

CHAPTER 8

The Buddhist Interpretation of Auspicious Signs

8.1 Auspiciousness in the Indian Context

We have already several times in this study touched upon the Indian concept of auspicious signs (*maṅgala*). *Maṅgala* means "auspicious", "prosperous", "lucky" and "festive".[1] These auspicious signs belong to an old shared sacred Indian culture. In the words of Karunaratne, "the Hindus, Jains and the Buddhists consider certain objects as particularly auspicious and capable of bringing about happiness, prosperity and protection to those who behold them or use them as amulets or ornaments".[2] They are often referred to as the eight auspicious signs (*aṣṭamaṅgala*) because they often occur in a group of eight. The *aṣṭamaṅgala* is a confluence of two symbolic systems, the symbolism of the number eight and individual signs with magical properties. The number eight was regarded as an especially auspicious and mystic number, and according to Alex Wayman, connected with female symbolism and particularly with Śrī Lakṣmī.[3] However, altogether the number of auspicious signs are more than forty. According to Karunaratne, the eight auspicious signs are also connected with the eight cardinal points of the compass.[4]

According to literary traditions (*Mānasāra* etc.) a fly whisk, flag, umbrella, lamp, conch, *śrīvatsa*, *pūrnaghata*, svastika and mirror seem to be the most favoured signs.[5] *Mānasāra* specifically mentions that the *aṣṭamaṅgalas* should be depicted on the crowns of kings.[6] The signs seen in the group of *aṣṭamaṅgala* in visual art differ from those mentioned in literary texts. This is not surprising as the use of auspicious signs must have been an ancient practice with many local variations. Auspicious signs in visual art are certainly older than the texts dealing with them which are left to us. Originally, these *maṅgalas* may have been used for their individual magical properties, not just

[1] Rhys Davids & Stede, *Pali English* ..., p. 513.
[2] T B Karunaratne, "Aṣṭamangala. The Eight Auspicious Symbols", *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. New Series.* Vol. 15 (1971), p. 48.
[3] A Wayman, "The Mathurā Set of Aṣṭamaṅgala (Eight Auspicious Symbols) in Early and Later Times", *Mathurā. The Cultural Heritage.* Edited by D M Srinivasan (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1989), pp. 236–237.
[4] Karunaratne, "Aṣṭamangala ...", pp. 59, 61.
[5] Ibid., p. 50.
[6] Loc. cit.

as a group of eight. The main reason why Buddhists adopted these signs must have been that they were meaningful, important and well known to the majority of people in India. The *svastika* and other auspicious signs were often depicted on houses, temple doors and cattle-sheds etc. for protection.[7] To use auspicious signs must have been a way for the Buddhists to protect themselves, but also to popularize and strengthen the Buddhist movement.

We have already seen that auspicious signs played a significant part in early Buddhist art. Together with mythological creatures and local deities, they established Buddhist places as auspicious sites both for the Buddhists themselves and the local people. Naturally, the Buddhists could not just accept this worldly (*lokika*) auspiciousness as a final aim. We know from the textual tradition that the Buddhists had an otherworldly (*lokuttara*) ultimate aim. Blessings from forces other than the individual himself did not accord with the doctrine believed to have been taught by the Buddha. However, the Buddhist canon did not condemn these *maṅgalas* in popular folklore. Instead, in a typical Buddhist way they reinterpreted them. The Buddhist interpretation of the *maṅgalas* is an ethicalization of popular folklore. In the *Mahāmaṅgala sutta* in *Sutta Nipāta* (258–269) it is clearly pointed out that blessing comes out of good deeds performed by the individual.

8.2 Charismatic Authority

We must consider the legitimacy of the Buddha to be based on charismatic authority. Weber described charisma as a certain quality by which an individual is set apart from ordinary people and treated as though he were endowed with supernatural, superhuman or specifically exceptional qualities.[8] As far as we can tell this description fits very well with how his disciples regarded the Buddha. A Buddha is believed to have received threefold knowledge during the enlightenment; the memory of previous lives, seeing the rebirth of others and the destruction of spiritual faults (*āśravas*). There is no reason to call into question the fact that the Buddha was regarded as a charismatic leader with superhuman qualities by his disciples.

After the death of the Buddha his closest disciples may have continued his charismatic authority. Several of his disciples probably also had the charisma to attract many followers. The authority and charisma they achieved through personal connection and friendship with the Buddha himself was probably very powerful. Both Śāriputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana had died before the Buddha. It was Mahākāśyapa who became one of the leading authorities after his death. Monastic lineages were transmitted from master to disciples. A line of masters who transmit the *dharma* was, according to *Aśokāvadāna* and *Di-*

[7] Stutley, Stutley, *A Dictionary of Hinduism* ..., p. 295.
[8] M Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 329.

vyāvadāna, recorded from Mahākāśyapa. It continued with Ānanda, Śāṇavāsa and finally to Upagupta who lived at the time of Aśoka.[9] Another line of masters started with Upāli and continued with Dāsaka, Sonaka, Siggava and finally Moggaliputta Tissa. According to *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa,* they transmitted the *Vinaya.*[10] Doubtless, in a couple of generations there must have been a shift within the Buddhist organization from authority based on charisma to authority based on tradition.

Controversies about the meaning of doctrinal and disciplinary matters soon arose among the Buddhists. It was impossible to keep the followers of the Buddha together. Even if knowledge of the *dharma* was a way to establish authority, the Buddhist *saṅgha* was spread over a large part of the continent and no legitimate authority presided over the order. At least six schools or sects, Mahāsāṃghikas, Theravādins, Mahīśāsakas, Dharmaguptakas, Sarvāstivādins and Mūlasarvāstivādins, prepared fully developed *Vinaya* rules.[11] Thus, Buddhists could not be united by the *dharma* and one could no longer refer for authority to personal memories of the Buddha or his closest disciples. Without charismatic authority the Buddhist movement lacked an obvious unifying force.

Even if he was not present any longer, the Buddha himself was the only uniting force still existing for the Buddhists. He was needed in the mind of the Buddhists even more than during his lifetime. Therefore, the need for the Buddha as a unifying force for the *saṅgha* was important for the development that led to elaborate biographic stories, visual images and speculations about the nature of the Buddha. The Buddha became the subject of veneration and worship not only for laypeople but also for monks and nuns. Particular epithets accentuated specific qualities of the Buddha. These epithets became subjects in meditation practice. Later, the body of the Buddha became the subject for speculations. Even if Śākyamuni Buddha was gone forever, he was present through his *dharmakāya.* The *stūpa*, regarded as the Buddha himself, stood at the centre of Buddhist veneration. The need for the Buddha as an uniting force must be seen as important for all these speculations and venerations of the Buddha. Therefore, it must also be seen as one of the main reasons behind the origin and development of Buddhist aniconic art.

8.3 The Presence of the Buddha as an Expression of Auspiciousness

It is the *stūpa* and the cult practice connected with the *stūpa* that exposes the origin of Buddhist aniconic art. It is the awareness of the origin of Buddhist

9 Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism* ..., pp. 206–212.
10 Ibid., pp. 203–205.
11 C S Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline. The Sanskrit Prātimokṣa Sūtras of the Mahāsāṃghikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins* (University Park: Pennssylvania State Univiversity Press, 1975), p. 28.

aniconic art from sacred and auspicious signs, local deities and mythological creatures that can give us a better understanding of its uniqueness. It is the transformation of these signs into specific Buddhist aniconic signs that clearly exposes the origin of Buddhist aniconic art. It was these signs from a shared sacred Indian culture that established the auspiciousness of Buddhist cultic sites.

Aniconic art connected auspicious signs with the life and teachings of the Buddha. The transformation from a shared sacred Indian art to a specific Buddhist aniconic art must be seen as a way to emphasize the Buddha as an expression of auspiciousness. Aniconic art expresses the fact *that* the Buddha was present. The different indexical signs pointing to the Buddha presaged the making of the anthropomorphic image of the Buddha. The Buddha was already there. The emphasis upon the Buddha enforced this development. Influences from Hellenistic and Central Indian art determined *how* the Buddha was objectified in art. The Buddha was "present" among his followers already before he was depicted anthropomorphically. The Buddhists were already living face to face with the Buddha. He was "present" in the mind of the meditators. He was also "present" in the *stūpa* and the relics and he was surely "alive" through all the stories that were told about his life. Finally, the Buddha was also "present" in Buddhist aniconic art. This emphasis upon the Buddha is a direct continuation and intensification of the auspiciousness that characterized Buddhist cultic sites from an early time. Therefore, it was not an innovation of motive for the Buddhists when they started to make images of the Buddha. He was already there.

However, aniconic signs pointing to the Buddha were not suspended when anthropomorphic images of the Buddha appeared. Aniconic art existed side by side with iconic art. Especially in Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa aniconic art continued to be made side by side with anthropomorphic images of the Buddha. Furthermore, *buddhapāda* slabs with auspicious signs continued to be produced throughout the history of Buddhism. Therefore, we must call attention to the differences between iconic and aniconic Buddhist art. Is it reasonable to assume two different and complementary traditions in Buddhist art, one iconic and one aniconic? Is aniconic art an expression of auspiciousness in this world and iconic art an expression of liberation from this world? Without reducing the complexity of Buddhism, no one can deny that within Buddhism there are both worldly and otherworldly ambitions. We have several times seen worldly expressions of auspiciousness in Buddhist aniconic art. However, there is no reason to assume that Buddhist iconic art is only an expression of soteriology. Instead, the anthropomorphic image of the Buddha consists of both worldly and otherworldly expressions. The expression of both auspiciousness in this world and liberation from this world are expressed, more or less, in all Buddhist visual art from the 2nd or early 1st century BC. This holds for both iconic and aniconic art.

Let us take the Buddha image as an example. The soteriology is clearly

expressed in the gestures of the Buddha image, but the auspiciousness is also quite clear. First of all, the auspiciousness of the Buddha has over and over again been used for political reasons. Many images of the Buddha are believed to have supernatural powers and countless are the rulers that have used a powerful Buddha image as a royal palladium to strengthen their religious and political legitimacy. In addition, popular tradition surrounding the first Buddha image also expresses worldly aspects. The first image of the Buddha was, according to several traditions, made during the lifetime of the Buddha, or at least not long after his death. The legends of the sandalwood image and Udayana image both express rulers longing to see the missing Buddha. One more example is the reclining Buddha so often seen in Southeast Asia. At the same time as it reflects liberation from this world it is also often depicted with auspicious signs on the footprints. Moreover, early images of the Buddha from Mathurā also express worldly auspiciousness. The Mathurā artists created, in the words of Herbert Härtel, "... the image of the Master as a vision of the Great Being, the Mahāpuruṣa, in which dwell the essential powers of a king dominating the world as well as those of a Buddha".[12] Thus, worldly and otherworldly expressions cannot easily be separated in Buddhist visual art.

8.4 Summary

The emphazis upon the Buddha was a direct continuation and intensification of the auspiciousness that characterized Buddhist cultic sites. The Buddha became the central concept for ethics, worship, biographic narrations, visual images, devotional contemplations and later also philosophical speculations. Buddhist aniconic art presaged the making of anthropomorphic images of the Buddha. Therefore, it was not an innovation of motive for the Buddhists when they started to make anthropomorphic images of the Buddha.

Auspicious signs (*maṅgalas*) were used in folklore for their individual magical properties, bringing happiness, prosperity and protection. Buddhists did not condemned them. Instead, these *maṅgalas* established Buddhist sites as auspicious places. Buddhists not only accepted these *maṅgalas*, they also reinterpreted them in accordance with the doctrines believed to have been taught by the Buddha. At the same time that Buddhists were a part of a shared sacred Indian culture with auspicious signs and mythological creatures, they also reinterpret the *maṅgalas* and pointed out that real blessings only comes out of good deeds done by the individual. The tension between the worldly (*lokika*) and the otherworldly (*lokuttara*) has always been a part of Buddhist history.

Aniconic art was not suspended when anthropomorphic images of the Bud-

[12] H Härtel, "The Concept of the Kapardin Buddha Type of Mathura", *South Asian Archaeology 1983. Papers from the Seventh International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe, Held in the Musées Royaux d´Art et d´Histoire, Brussels*. Edited by J Schotsmans and M Taddei. Vol. 2 (Naples: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1985), p. 670.

dha appeared. Iconic and aniconic art continued to exist side by side. However, the expression of auspiciousness in this world and liberation from this world are expressed in both iconic and aniconic art. The worldly and otherworldly expressions cannot easily be separated in Buddhist visual art. The auspiciousness tradition coming from a shared sacred Indian culture merged together with a narrative tradition about the life and teachings of the Buddha. This transformation of a shared sacred Indian art into a specific Buddhist aniconic and iconic art can be seen as a way to emphasize the Buddha as an expression of auspiciousness.

Conclusion

(1) The earliest art in Buddhist cultic places belonged to a shared sacred Indian culture. It consisted of simple signs, such as tridents, wheels, sacred trees, *pūrnaghaṭas*, lotus flowers etc. and mythological creatures. This art reflected a notion of auspiciousness, prosperity, fertility and abundance and established the auspiciousness of Buddhist cultic sites. It was transformed into carefully made compositions representing the Buddha in a narrative context without presenting him physically.

(2) Buddhist aniconic art was closely connected with everyday religious life at Buddhist cultic sites, foremost the *stūpa*. The *stūpa* were built at existing sacred sites and were regarded as auspicious places for the local people irrespective of whether they called themselves Buddhists or not. Likewise, the artists and craftsmen were paid workers, working for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. Different beholders may have had different interpretation of the art they saw on the *stūpa*.

(3) Buddhist aniconic art cannot be explained by a prohibition against images of the Buddha or with a doctrine that made it unsuitable to depict the body of the Buddha. Likewise, the practice of *kasiṇa* exercises and *buddha-anusmṛti* cannot explain the origin and transformation of aniconic art into Buddhist aniconic art.

(4) There is a complex connection between visual art and texts. Buddhist aniconic art can not be explained as only illustrating Buddhist literature. Furthermore, the connection between early signs (trees, wheels etc.) and events in the life of the Buddha may not be as old as it is commonly believed. Some of the signs may even have influenced the development of biographies of the Buddha.

(5) The transformation of aniconic art consisting of auspicious signs into Buddhist aniconic art was indicated by the connection of these signs with a narrative tradition about the life and teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha was interpreted as an expression of auspiciousness, but he was also connected with a soteriological perspective. The importance Śākyamuni Buddha played in the formation of Buddhist art is difficult to overestimate. He became the central concept for ethics, worship, biographic narrations, visual images, devotional contemplations and later also philosophical speculations.

(6) Buddhist aniconic art presaged the making of anthropomorphic images of the Buddha. He was already there. Therefore, it was not an innovation of motive for the Buddhists when they started to make anthropomorphic images of the Buddha. Worldly and otherworldly expressions cannot easily be separated in Buddhist visual art. The expression of auspiciousness in this world and liberation from this world are expressed in both iconic and aniconic art.

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Abbreviations

AN	*Aṅguttara-Nikāya*
DN	*Dīgha-Nikāya*
Mppś	*Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*
PraS	*Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra*
SN	*Saṃyutta-Nikāya*
VM	*Vimuttimagga*
VS	*Visuddhimagga*

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